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Reverence and the Gentlemanly Style in Herman Melville and Nathaniel Hawthorne

by

© William M. Bartley

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled Reverence and the Gentlemanly Style in Herman Melville and Nathaniel Hawthorne submitted by William M. Bartley in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate the commitment that Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville made to the tradition of the gentlemanly style, or, as Hawthorne called it, "the style of a man of society," and, following from this, to show how this style could prove to be an instrument of perception, judgement, and expression adequate to the representation of the tragic experience. To this end, this study focusses upon Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* and Melville's *Billy Budd, Sailor* as exemplary instances of this tradition. Indeed, in spite of obvious objections, *Billy Budd* and *The Scarlet Letter* ought to be drawn together. The resonant presence of *The Scarlet Letter* behind *Billy Budd* reveals to us that it was through Hawthorne that Melville came to comprehend the intellectual and emotional capacities of the gentlemanly style and of the motivating intelligence it embodies.

This quality of intelligence, as this study shows, is shaped and directed by the virtue of reverence. Hawthorne and Melville participate in a continuous tradition of concern which one encounters throughout the history of western thought. To recover this traditional understanding as Hawthorne and Melville would have likely understood it is to discover an essential connection between reverence and tragic awareness and between reverence and the conception of the gentleman in the nineteenth century. It is, moreover, to discover that reverence is a delicate and unstable balance

between sympathy and criticism, or, as Coleridge defined it, "the synthesis of love and fear," which is the condition of true judgement. However, Hawthorne's commitment to this tradition, as an examination of "The Custom House" and *The Scarlet Letter* reveals, is problematic. His style often betrays a sentimentality which is antithetical to reverent attention, a sentimentality which is ultimately a product of the gentlemanly style's intellectual roots in eighteenth-century rationalism. This leads us to the old-fashioned notion of the "dissociation of sensibility" as a means of illuminating Hawthorne's limitations. Melville, on the other hand, is more critically aware of the moral and stylistic implications of reverent attention. Consequently, *Billy Budd* is the greater work and, moreover, is an acute criticism of *The Scarlet Letter*.

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I. Introduction

At the climactic moment of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, Arthur Dimmesdale, having delivered the Election Day sermon, proceeds through the market place to the scaffold upon which Hester Prynne stood in shame seven years before. Then, beckoning Hester and Pearl to accompany him, he ascends the scaffold and confesses his sin before the assembled community. In doing so, he dramatically reveals the scarlet letter on his breast:

> 'He bids you look again at Hester's scarlet letter! He tells that, with all its mysterious horror, it is but the shadow of what he bears on his own breast, and even this, his own red stigma, is no more than the type of what seared his inmost heart! Stand here any that question God's judgement on a sinner? Behold! Behold a dreadful witness to it!'
>
> With a convulsive motion he tore away the ministerial band from his breast. It was revealed! But it were irreverent to describe that revelation.[1]

I have quoted this passage because it presents us with an epitome of Hawthorne's style and an instance of the stylistic tradition in which he participates. Moreover, it reveals to us, in what is not a separable concern, the characteristic quality of his intelligence. Not only does it have broad implications for how we are to assess *The Scarlet Letter*, which was certainly Hawthorne's greatest achievement; what we discover in this passage also has the greatest possible significance in assessing Herman

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[1] Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, eds. William Charvat and Fredson Bowers (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 1962), p. 255. All further references will be made to this edition.

Melville's achievement in *Billy Budd, Sailor*. Such an assertion might, at first glance, be shocking, but given the long history of the commentary which has documented the relationship between the two men, and the fact that it is hardly controversial to claim that Hawthorne, in some sense, influenced Melville's development as a writer, it should not arouse much surprise. *Billy Budd* is, in fact, a particularly striking instance of this influence and there are many reasons which compel us, I think, to draw *Billy Budd* and *The Scarlet Letter* together, in spite of the fact that the two works stand almost forty years apart. Indeed, *Billy Budd* clearly reflects the resonant presence of *The Scarlet Letter* and, furthermore, is, in a significant way, a retelling of it, or, at least, a reworking of it. But no relationship between the two works is more rewarding to explore than that of their styles, for both works, as I hope to show, are notable instances of the commitment both writers made to the style evident in the passage quoted above and thus a commitment to the motivating and enabling intelligence that this style embodies and which makes for great literature.

We can get a start at determining the specific nature of this motivating and enabling intelligence if we ask of the passage the following question: why does Hawthorne refuse to describe what Dimmesdale reveals to the assembly? The answer is, perhaps, obvious, but before taking it up, we must first take note of the fact that this passage has caught the attention of other readers who have, explicitly or not, asked the same question. Nevertheless, at the same time, they have responded with an interpretive license which is really quite remarkable--a fact which can only be explained, I think, by a perplexing and ultimately ominous refusal of the modern literary critic to state the obvious.[2] The most important of these readers is Richard Brodhead, whose recent and highly praised work, *Hawthorne, Melville, and the Novel*, stands out as the most thorough and ingenious assault on the obvious. Thus, if one is to get at the essential character of the intelligence disclosed by this passage, one must first take up what it cannot possibly be, in spite of the considerable authority Brodhead's argument has and is likely to acquire.

Brodhead singles out the passage quoted above for special attention. He observes of it that

> no sooner does [Dimmesdale] make his revelation than the author draws the curtain before our eyes: 'But it were irreverent to describe that revelation.' And, having dismissed the ghastly miracle, he continues with his narration of the scene.
>
> By now we have grown accustomed to seeing the scarlet letter announce itself as symbol in the middle of a fully dramatic scene. But this demurrer on Hawthorne's part is nonetheless startling. It is hard to say which is more surprising: the fact that he insists on including as the climax of his scene such a strange and wondrous revelation, or the fact that, having done so, he then refuses to show it forth.[3]

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[2] See for example, Harry C. West, "Hawthorne's Editorial Pose," *American Literature*, 44 (1972), 218 and Daniel Cottom, "Hawthorne versus Hester: The Ghostly Dialectic of Romance in *The Scarlet Letter*," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 24 (1982), 53.

[3] Richard Brodhead, *Hawthorne, Melville, and the Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), pp. 66-67.

The pertinent question then is, as he puts it, "why should he so carefully arouse the sort of curiosity that he shows here and then so pointedly cheat it out of its gratification?" Why indeed? For this fragment of the confession, taken out of context as it is, cannot adequately suggest the degree of curiosity that Hawthorne does in fact arouse concerning what is on Dimmesdale's breast--and it is also true, as Brodhead correctly points out, that this is a mystery that lies under the surface of the entire novel, just as it is true that we are never permitted direct contact with it. If Hawthorne's "demurrer" here seems, as it does to Brodhead, obscurely motivated, it is nevertheless deliberate and thus cries out for explanation.

For Brodhead, this "drawing of the curtain" is intelligible and appropriate if we are attentive to what he believes to be the characteristic feature of Hawthorne's creative practice. This is a matter of noting how Hawthorne handles the "mixed medium," of how, that is, he manages the "distinctly different representational modes" of realism and romance. Brodhead contends that Hawthorne is primarily interested in pitting these modes against each other, creating a "conflict of fictions" in order to call attention to--in fact, to bring to the very center of the reader's attention--the nature of the imaginative process of fiction itself.

This takes the form of exploiting this conflict of fictions as a means to test and to criticize each mode's capacity and adequacy as a "vehicle of truth;" it reveals that the "reality of their imagined world, rather than lying in any one of these fictions, comes into existence in their interaction."[4] We become aware, so Brodhead argues, of our complacent assumptions of how we construct reality as we become aware, through the dynamics of this conflict, that each mode excludes ranges of experience included by the other. Accordingly we learn to "resist submission to fictive illusions" as we attend to, instead, "a larger subject, the nature of the mental activities through which the fictions of literature among others, are created."[5] And since Hawthorne's mixed medium is a record of his own adventures in exploring the imaginative creation of reality, we become self-conscious of our own activities as readers; we participate, if we are sensitive readers, in exploring the relationship between form and reality as well. Thus, Brodhead can go on to make the astonishing claim that our interest in Hawthorne--he extends it to include Melville as well--

> lies less in any message they have to deliver than in their energetically inquisitive habits of mind, and that the permanent value of their work has less to do with the fully developed images of life that it unfolds than with its investigation of how the mind envisions and makes sense of experience.[6]

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[4] Brodhead, p. 20.

[5] Brodhead, p. 23.

[6] Brodhead, p. 24. See Edwin M. Eigner, *The Metaphysical Novel in England and America* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978) for an argument that is very similar to Brodhead's.

We are to value both writers then not as mere writers of fiction or, rather, as writers of mere fiction, but as writers of meta-fiction.

Hawthorne's demurrer during his presentation of the confession scene is, accordingly for Brodhead, apt confirmation of this view. It represents the actual point of conflict between narrative modes--the point where Hawthorne "brings to a head a conflict of narrative methods that has run all through the book." It is easy enough to isolate the two conflicting modes. The first yields the kind of suspense associated with the realistic novel where the chief interest is "what choice Dimmesdale will make, what role his decision will play in his own psychic life, and what effect his choice will have on the other characters"[7]--the realm, that is, of the ordinary and probable causes of human action. The other yields the kind of suspense associated with the "ghostly romance" in which the chief interest is the mystery surrounding the stigma on Dimmesdale's breast. This mode "operates by a magical order of causal determinism in which internal conditions are externalized as physical appearances"--the realm of the improbable and fantastic. Hawthorne's refusal to describe the revelation is, in this light, and if I understand Brodhead correctly, a means of calling attention to the exclusivity of the realistic mode--of abruptly exposing its incapacity to handle the improbable and fantastic. Moreover, as a result, Hawthorne presumably renders "reality problematic" and the reader becomes aware of his assumptions about how he constructs reality and how these constructs are confined and limited by formal conventions. And once we are aware of the "problematic" status of reality by means of this manoeuvre, we become engaged in a "self-conscious act of interpretation" for Hawthorne, as Brodhead claims, "releases us from his narrative authority" thus giving us freedom to seek our own explanations for the presence of the scarlet letter. We are left alone "to complete the novel by determining its reality as we think best, and to be conscious of our imaginative procedure as we do so."[8]

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[7] Brodhead, p. 67.

It is certainly fair to say that Brodhead's argument is more complex and more closely argued than my summary can suggest. Nevertheless, it is not an easy argument to follow nor is it a simple matter to criticize it, for it needs to be challenged on many points. Not the least important of these is Brodhead's no doubt academically respectable but nonetheless extraordinary and alarming assumption that great works of literature induce a salutary self-consciousness which is ultimately difficult if not impossible to distinguish from solipsism or, at least, inasmuch as we can communicate to others how we have completed the novel as we think best, the sort of fashionably anarchic imbecility that stands at one remove from solipsism. But for the purposes of this study I wish to argue more specifically and strenuously that even if it were somehow possible and desirable that a literary work could concern itself merely with the representation of incommensurate forms in collision with each other, it is simply not true that this is the kind of work Hawthorne wrote. And we know this if we attend to the full import of Hawthorne's demurrer--the statement that "it were irreverent to describe that revelation." Indeed, Brodhead's complete argument about *The Scarlet Letter*, since it depends in great measure on how he construes the significance of this statement, collapses around a relatively simple problem of interpretation, or, more certainly, a problem that requires a good deal less ingenuity to solve.

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[8] Brodhead, p. 68.

It should be sufficient to say, in answer to Brodhead's original question, that Hawthorne cheats our curiosity for the simple and straightforward reason that it would be *irreverent* to satisfy it. After all, how should we receive the revelation of the deepest secrets of the heart, fraught as that revelation is with the sacred? Certainly not, as our own experience and an ordinary sense of tact might dictate, with the intrusive and insensitive disrespect implied by the term "irreverent" and which satisfying our curiosity about the details on Dimmesdale's breast would entail. And even if we don't think of the matter in terms of irreverence, we may still find that Hawthorne's demurrer accords with a more general sense that there is *something wrong*, in a similar way, with standing idly by and gawking at the carnage of an automobile accident or the scene of a mob execution. But clearly, in the light of Brodhead's argument, it is not sufficient to call attention to this very basic scruple. This insufficiency in turn raises the question of why, if this is a very basic scruple and one which most of us share, does Brodhead not see it? Perhaps he feels something less than a sense of "something wrong" or feels that such a sense is irrelevant to the study and criticism of literature, and, thus, he can proceed to purify Hawthorne's mind and art of niggling ethical concerns. At any rate, if Brodhead had seen this, he would have known that Hawthorne's purpose in frustrating our curiosity could not be to provoke a self-conscious act of reflection on how we make sense of reality; rather, he denies us this satisfaction because his purpose is to judge the propriety of seeking it. Brodhead would also have realized that Hawthorne could hardly then "release us from his narrative authority," for the final statement of the passage, which presumably triggers this release, is as firm an assertion of this authority as one could imagine.

And, following from this, Brodhead would have seen that *The Scarlet Letter* cannot be distilled into a "conflict of fictions." Although one can distinguish the operative presence of different literary forms in the novel, and even though different literary forms may have conflicting intentions, there is no longer any possible reason to conclude that they are at odds with each other here. One is, instead, confronted with a more ordinary and, no doubt, less "interesting" kind of fictional procedure, with, that is, the creation of "images of life" of which the confession scene is certainly an example. Here, the wonderful has its place amid the conventions of realism, for as Aristotle has said, "this, too, is probable according to that saying of Agathon: 'It is a part of probability that many improbable things will happen.'" That is, indeed, part of the character of the tragic catastrophe--the sudden occurrence of the improbable probability--and Hawthorne's demurrer is one way of discriminating and registering this event. Brodhead would have then felt more inclined to take Hawthorne at his word when he says at the beginning of *The Scarlet Letter* that the story he is about to tell is "a tale of human frailty and sorrow."

Moreover, as the passage from the conclusion suggests, it is a tale told with reverent care, and we should now be able to regard it as an instance of the encompassing and enabling quality of intelligence that Hawthorne's son Julian recognized in his father:

> In Nathaniel Hawthorne the sentiment of reverence was very highly developed, and I do not know that too much weight can be given to this fact. It is the mark of a fine and lofty organization, and enables its possessor to apprehend, to suffer, and to enjoy things which are above the sphere of other people. It lays him open to mortal injuries, and, in compensation, it enriches him with exquisite benefits. It opens his eyes to what is above him, and thereby deepens his comprehension of what is around him and at his feet. Reverence, combined with imagination, and vivified by that faculty of divining God's

> meaning, which belongs to genius,--this equipment is, of itself, enough to educate a man in all the wisdom of the world, as well as much that appertains to the higher region.[9]

If we seize on the obvious relevance of this description, we will find it impossible to regard Hawthorne as the troubled metaphysician that Brodhead claims him to be; we will find, instead, confirmation of the justice of Horatio Bridge's judgement that Hawthorne was "a gentleman in the best sense of the word."[10] This is because the virtue of reverence is, in fact, at the core of the conception of the gentleman, who for the nineteenth-century American stood as the ideal of thought, feeling and action to which any man, regardless of birth, could aspire to and be judged against. The connection between reverence and the gentleman is made, implicitly at least, in the courtesy literature. J.R. Vernon, for example, in a statement directly relevant to the conclusion of *The Scarlet Letter*, reminds us that the gentleman "is not curious; he is, of course, the man who walks by a window without a sideglance, . . ."[11] We detect the same gentlemanly and reverential restraint on Melville's part as well in a passage which helps to illuminate the conclusion to *The Scarlet Letter*, and which permits us to assert, in a preliminary way at least, that Melville and Hawthorne shared a commitment to the aims of the gentleman. We recall the scene in which Captain Vere communicates Budd's sentence to him in private, and after a few thoughtful and sympathetic speculations as to what might have happened between them, Melville observes, finally, that

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[9] Julian Hawthorne, *Nathaniel Hawthorne and His Wife* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1884), I, 93.

[10] Horatio Bridge, *Personal Recollections of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (New York: Harper and Company, 1893), p. 6.

[11] J.R. Vernon, "The Grand Old Name of Gentleman," *Contemporary Review*, 11 (1869), 572.

> ...there is no telling the sacrament, seldom if in any case revealed to the gadding world, wherever...two of great Nature's nobler order embrace. There is a privacy, at the time, inviolable to the survivor; and holy oblivion, the sequel to each diviner magnanimity, providentially covers all at last.[12]

We look in vain, needless to say, for a conflict of fictions here as well. In this light, one final statement about Brodhead that ought be made is that he is guilty of more than a sideglance here and this reveals to us that if it is no longer necessary for a literary critic to be a gentleman, both criticism in general and our understanding of what Hawthorne *meant* in particular can only be diminished.

Finally, we discover that the reverential attention exhibited by both men leads us inevitably to their style and the tradition they commit themselves to. Turning back to the case of Hawthorne, we see that to encounter his reverence and to confirm the very large claims his son makes for it is to encounter the natural form it takes in the gentlemanly style or, as Hawthorne called it, "the style of a man of society." This phrase is taken from his preface to the 1851 edition of *Twice-told Tales*, which provides us with a general characterization of this style. He observes, first, that his sketches have

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[12] Harrison Hayford and Merton M. Sealts, Jr., eds. *Billy Budd, Sailor*, by Herman Melville (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), p. 115. All further references will be made to this edition.

> the coolness of meditative habit, which diffuses itself through the feeling and observation of every sketch. Instead of passion there is sentiment;... Whether from lack of power, or an unconquerable reserve, the Author's touches have often an effect of tameness; the merriest man can hardly contrive to laugh at his broadest humor; the tenderest woman, one would suppose, will hardly shed warm tears at his deepest pathos.[13]

And then, further on, he adds:

> They have none of the abstruseness of idea, or obscurity of expression, which mark the written communications of a solitary mind with itself. They never need translation. It is, in fact, the style of a man of society. Every sentence, so far as it embodies thought or sensibility may be understood and felt by anybody who will give himself the trouble to read it, and will take up the book in a proper mood....They are not the talk of a secluded man with his own mind and heart...but his attempts and very imperfectly successful ones, to open an intercourse with the world.[14]

These remarks attest to the accessibility and clarity that Hawthorne cultivated in his style, as the qualities upon which opening an intercourse with the world depends. But these aims are accompanied by the modesty and reserve which one owes, out of respect for one's audience and one's subject. It is a style which brings the selfish impulses to heel.

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[13] Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Twice-told Tales*, eds. J. Donald Crowley, Fredson Bowers, and John Manning (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1974), p. 5.
[14] Hawthorne, *Twice-told Tales*, p. 6.

These qualities reflect, moreover, the tremendous prestige of the eighteenth-century periodical essayists, particularly Addison and Steele, in nineteenth-century American letters and the consequent influence *The Spectator* had on how a nineteenth-century American writer would form his style. This influence was felt, as one might expect, well before the turn of the century, and Benjamin Franklin offers a representative statement of the appeal these writers had, as he relates the story of his first encounter with *The Spectator*. After purchasing a volume, he says, "I read it over and over, and was much delighted with it. I thought the writing excellent, and wished, if possible, to imitate it."[18] This was an experience shared, no doubt, by succeeding generations of writers as the gentlemanly style became the great common style not only in America but in the English-speaking world. Literary activity in America, as it was emerging out of the Federalist era, was, in fact, dominated by writers who sought to emulate the example of *The Spectator* in such publications as the *Port Folio* and *Salmagundi*; and Washington Irving, who was the most dominant literary figure of his generation and an influence himself on later writers, would become known as the "American Addison."

Nor was this prestige and influence confined to the literary world. It is the style which anyone who attended an

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[18] Leonard L. Labaree, *et al.*, eds. *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), p. 62.

American college in the early nineteenth century was expected to acquire--and this was a matter of giving one's days and nights to the example of the "simple, natural and just" style in *The Spectator*. Hawthorne, who graduated from Bowdoin College in 1825, had the typical undergraduate experience of instruction in English composition with the guidance of Hugh Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* and Murray's *English Grammar*, which for the most part, was an abridgement and adaptation of Blair. This is significant because Blair gave his considerable authority to a recommendation of Addison, above all others, as "the safest model for imitation, and the freest from considerable defects, which the language affords." And it is in *The Spectator* (although from Steele) that we find as representative a statement as any of the motivating assumptions behind this kind of writing:

> It would be a noble Improvement, or rather a Recovery of what we call good Breeding if nothing were to pass amongst us for agreeable which was the least Transgression against that Rule of Life called Decorum, or a Regard to Decency. This would command the respect of Mankind, because it carries in it a Deference to their good Opinion; as Humility lodged in a worthy Mind is always attended with a certain Homage, which no haughty Soul, with all the Arts imaginable, will ever be able to purchase. *Tully* says Virtue and Decency are so nearly related, that it is difficult to separate them from each other but in our Imagination. As the Beauty of the Body always accompanies the Health of it, so certainly is Decency Concomitant to Virtue; As Beauty of Body, with an agreeable Carriage, pleases the Eye, and that Pleasure consists in that we observe all the Parts with a certain Elegance are proportioned to each other; so does Decency of Behaviour which appears in our Lives obtain the Approbation of all with whom we converse, from the Order, Constancy,

> and Moderation of our Words and Actions. This flows from the Reverence we bear towards every good Man, and to the World in general;...[14]

Propriety, decorum and decency, then--and associated virtues such as modesty, politeness and reserve--along with order, constancy and moderation are the forms and gestures appropriate to and indicative of the "Reverence we bear towards every good Man, and to the World in general."

Still, even if we can grant that Hawthorne and Melville committed themselves to this style, it is not immediately clear how this commitment *could* make for great literature. The very large claims that Julian Hawthorne makes for the reverential quality of his father's intelligence are sufficient, I think, to alert us to its capacities. Unfortunately, however, Julian's remarks will strike most of us as vague and not very illuminating, less because of Julian than the fact that what appears to be true of the modern academic literary critic is true of us as well, although not perhaps to the same degree. We simply do not speak in this idiom anymore. And we may well find the reason in W.E.H. Lecky's prophetic statement of over a century ago--"the habits of modern civilization are most inimical" to the growth of a sense of reverence; indeed, "reverence is one of those feelings which, in utilitarian systems,"--and there is now no question that we are nurtured within a "utilitarian system"--"would occupy at best a very ambiguous position."[17] That it does at best occupy a very ambiguous position is perhaps most evident in the fact that many of us are no longer comfortable using the term in some of its traditional applications and are, thus, much further from understanding how it could allow us, as the younger Hawthorne says, "to apprehend, to suffer, and to enjoy things that are above the sphere of other people." For example, we can no longer say without awkwardness and fear of mockery that we feel a reverence for our friends, for authority, for God, for our elders, for the dead, or, perhaps most controversial of all, for the weaker vessel. And yet again, we do feel that there is "something wrong" if we were to show irreverence in these instances--and if the authority of "reverence" carried no weight at all we would find nothing amusing about the charming irreverence of Jim Thorpe, who, upon being presented with an Olympic gold medal by the King of Sweden at the Stockholm Games, returned with: "Thanks, King." We need, then, to develop this sense of "something wrong" into something more, if we are to understand not only Hawthorne and Melville, but to recover for ourselves the full weight of Julian Hawthorne's remarks. Ultimately, this is to recover the sense of a virtue which, as Owen Barfield has pointed out

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[14] Donald F. Bond, ed., *The Spectator*, No. 104 (29 June, 1711) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), I, 432-433.

> is not simply a virtue for which we may expect full marks in heaven, or a device for bolstering up the social establishment. It is an organ of perception

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[17] W.E.H. Lecky, *A History of European Morals from Augustus to Charlemagne*, 2nd. ed. (London: Longmans, Green and Company, 1869), I, 148.

> for a whole range of qualities that are as imperceptible without it as another whole range is imperceptible without an ear for music.[18]

The chapter to follow is an attempt at such a recovery, and, moreover, a recovery of the essential association of the virtue of reverence and the gentleman--a task which would have been considerably simplified if only Barfield had developed his pregnant observation further.

There is yet another and more serious difficulty, one that enormously complicates our judgement of the efficacy of the gentlemanly style. This is a problem that emerges in a close examination of *The Scarlet Letter*, in which Hawthorne establishes his presence as a gentleman but, at the same time, raises to our attention the rather serious flaws in his style. These flaws are, moreover, too deeply rooted to be accounted for as mere isolated failures in execution and concentration. They do suggest that Hawthorne's commitment to the style of the man of society was highly problematic and that this, in part at least, has something to do with the ultimately damaging restrictiveness built into the style itself. This, in turn, as I hope to clarify in a close reading of *The Scarlet Letter*--both "The Custom House" sketch and the tale itself--is a ~~product of this~~ style's intellectual roots in eighteenth-century rationalism, such that one must raise the issue of the "dissociation of sensibility" as a way to account for Hawthorne's limitations.

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[18] Owen Barfield, *What Coleridge Thought* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1971), pp. 10-11.

This is one reason why Hawthorne's achievement, although considerable, and achieved against difficult odds, pales when compared with *Billy Budd, Sailor*. For Melville is critically and triumphantly conscious of the implications of reverent attention where Hawthorne is not, so that *Billy Budd* is not only a demonstration of the efficacy of the gentleman in the face of the tragic experience but also an acute criticism of *The Scarlet Letter*.

II. Reverence, the Tragic, and the Gentleman

> In the intellectual order, the virtue of humility is nothing more nor less than the power of attention.[1]

The purpose of this chapter is to recover the sense of "reverence" as Hawthorne would likely have understood it. This is to discover that Hawthorne takes a place within a continuous tradition of concern which one finds everywhere in the history of western thought, finding expression in antiquity and Christianity and which survives among an embattled few--of which Barfield is certainly a notable example--in this century. Moreover, to recover this traditional understanding is also to discover how the gentleman and the gentlemanly style could be equal to the tragic experience, for there is, as I hope to unfold, both an essential connection between reverence and tragic awareness and between reverence and the conception of the gentleman.

Both Barfield and Julian Hawthorne stress that reverence is a particularly fine quality of awareness and perception--and the *O.E.D.* helps us to confirm this sense and to develop it a little further. Reverence is, first of all, "the deep or due respect felt or shown towards a person on account of his or her position or relationship; deference." It is also the "deep respect and veneration for some thing, place, or person regarded as having a sacred or exalted character." These definitions, unfortunately, do not shed very much light on the quality of awareness of which they are particular applications, for, again, as Barfield has alerted us, reverence "is not simply a virtue for which we may expect full marks in heaven, or a device for bolstering up the social establishment." But we get more of an opening into the more general sense of reverence if we consider a little more closely the nature of "respect" of which reverence is an intensification. "Respect" is "the deferential regard or esteem shown a person or thing,"--not too helpful, it would seem, except that clustering around this regard or esteem, once we look at the various alternative definitions of respect offered by the *O.E.D.*, are the related concepts of "consideration", "discrimination", "heed", "care", and "attention". All of these terms have something to do with perception and evaluation. "Respect", as such, is a concern for what something *is*, in itself.

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[1] Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, trans. Emma Craufurd (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1952), p. 116.

This implies, as the first two senses of "reverence" suggest, a capacity to recognize and acknowledge the excellent or the great where they exist and, further, a co-operative and coexisting capacity to discern and give heed to the boundaries and limits which define the object of attention, and which, in turn, define our relationship to it. The justification for the qualitative distinction between "respect" and "reverence" has, in this light, something to do with the sense that "reverence", as a heightened respect, is a response that is particularly attuned to the exceptional instance. It is a heightening which is in proportion to the importance and significance of the object of attention. Nevertheless, reverence, like respect, is primarily a concern for an *adequate* perception and is thus, ultimately and crucially, a concern for true judgement.

Irreverence, by implication, always involves a failure of attention, of care, of heed, of consideration, and of discrimination and is, as a result, a failure to do justice to one's object of attention. That is, it is always a misjudgement and distortion of fact--so that we recognize in irreverence the essentially selfish response in the sense that misjudgement and distortion can be willed and, when challenged, belligerently so. One thinks of, in this connection, Santayana's judgement of the "egotistical" romantic philosophers of the German school who are learned but always mistaken and whose attentions one can only feel as impertinent.[20] And behind this judgement is Plato, who isolates the "violent attachment to self" as the gravest fault of the soul--"one which all excuse in themselves and none therefore attempts to avoid." It is, as Plato adds,

> the constant source of all manner of misdeeds in every one of us. The eye of love is blind where the beloved is concerned, and so a man proves to be a bad judge of right, good, honor, in the conceit that more regard is due to his personality than to the real fact, whereas a man who means to be great must care neither for self nor for its belongings, but for justice, whether exhibited in his own conduct,

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[20] George Santayana, *Egotism in German Philosophy* (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1940), p. 146.

> or rather in that of another. From this same fault springs also the universal conviction that one's own folly is wisdom, with its consequences that we fancy we know everything when we know as good as nothing,...[21]

So much then for the appeal, as Plato calls attention to it, of "the maxim that 'everyone is naturally his own friend.'"[22]

Reverence, on the other hand, requires this effort to care "neither for self nor its belongings"--the effort, that is, to set aside mere personal interest in favor of the desire to realize what something essentially is. This is not in any sense a scientific or pseudo-scientific detachment, but the achievement of the kind of effacement which is a caring receptiveness--a disposition to allow one's perception and judgement to be shaped by the thing, to allow, without selfish intrusion, by showing care and giving heed, objects of attention to reveal and unfold themselves according to their proper character and value. This is precisely the kind of attention J.V. Cunningham has in mind--without calling it "reverence"--in his moving statement of how the problem of historical interpretation of literary texts is no different from the problem posed by any human relationship. And in making this comparison, he moves us a little closer to Hawthorne's concern in his presentation of the confession scene. For, as Cunningham directs us, we must ask, in either case:

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[21] A.E Taylor, trans., *Laws*, 5.731d-732a, in *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*, eds. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963).
[22] *Laws*, 5.731d.

> Shall we understand another on his terms or on ours? It is the problem of affection and truth, of appreciation and scholarship. Shakespeare has always been an object of affection and an object of study. Now, it is a common experience that affection begins in misunderstanding. We see our own meanings in what we love and we misconstrue for our own purposes. But life will not leave us there, and not only because of external pressures. What concerns us is naturally an object of study. We sit across the room and trace the lineaments of experience on the face of concern, and we find it is not what we thought it was. We come to see that what Shakespeare is saying is not what we thought he was saying, and we come finally to appreciate it for what it is. Where before we had constructed the fact from our feeling, we now construct our feeling from the fact. The end of affection and concern is accuracy and truth, with an alteration but no diminution of feeling.[23]

An affection for something or someone, as Cunningham stresses, is preeminently the desire to *know* the object of affection, to study it, "to trace the lineaments"--for knowledge is the means of possessing it. But if it is true affection it is also the motive behind purifying one's understanding of selfish misconstruction--of pre-emptive and oversimplified judgement--towards the end of understanding what something *is*, independently of what we desire it or need it to be. Affection, as such, has built into it a principle of approach and, yet, a principle of restraint. That is, it involves an original desire to possess--one is emotionally sterile if one does not desire this--which is counterbalanced by an equally caring receptiveness. In turn, this receptiveness is, in the light of Cunningham's remarks, a preparedness to give up one's allegiance to a misconstruction and to alter one's judgement as the occasion arises and requires. It involves the humbling awareness that true knowledge and true judgement is a process of accommodating the previously unaccounted for, or the previously excluded. Considered in this way, "affection" or "concern" or "love" is a kind of balance of cares or, rather, a resolution of the tensions implicit in the notion of affection. Moreover, affection takes its place among the cluster of concepts associated with reverence. That is, care, attention, consideration, regard, and heed all reflect, in some degree, and have built into them, this tension between the desire to approach and make intimate contact, on the one hand, and the same affectionate concern to render with accuracy and truth.

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[23] J.V. Cunningham, "Ripeness is All," in *The Collected Essays of J.V. Cunningham* (Chicago: The Swallow Press, 1976), pp. 7-8.

In this light, we can see that there is a natural connection between reverential attention--and the essentially heuristic form it takes--and F.R. Leavis' notion of tragic "impersonality" as he discusses it in his essay "Tragedy and the 'Medium.'" "Impersonality" and reverence share the same concern for purifying one's understanding of the selfish and pre-emptive. Indeed, the tragic, as Leavis points out,

> breaks down, or undermines and supercedes, such attitudes. It establishes below them a kind of profound impersonality in which experience matters, not because it is mine--because it is to me it belongs or happens, or because it issues in purpose

> or will, but because it is what it is, the 'mine' mattering only so far as the individual sentience is the indispensable focus of experience.[24]

The due response to the tragic experience, as he says later on, involves "a transcending of the ego--an escape from all attitudes of self-assertion," although "escape" is not meant to suggest an evasion of responsibility. Rather, it is to confront the tragic experience as "constructive and creative," which

> involves a recognizing of positive value as in some way defined and vindicated by death. It is as if we were challenged at the profoundest level with the question, 'In what does the significance of life reside?', and found ourselves contemplating, for answer, a view of life, and of the things giving it value, that makes the valued appear unquestionably more important than the valuer, so that the significance lies, clearly and inescapably, in the willing adhesion of the individual self to something other than itself.[25]

Tragic impersonally is thus in every way a surrender to what *is* and implies a desire to understand along with a receptiveness to the range and complexity of experience that D.W. Harding (whom Leavis quotes) attributes to Isaac Rosenberg, whose war poetry exhibits a "willingness--and ability--to let himself be new-born into the new situation, not subduing his experience to his established personality, . . ."[26] Reverence is built out of this same cooperation of desire and receptiveness, although, before the tragic experience, it finds its final extension and refinement. And like reverence, impersonality is an attitude which connects one to the real. Moreover, both find their proper opposite in egotism--the undue emphasis on the "valuer" as opposed to the "valued", the impulse to subdue one's experience to one's "established personality."

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[24] F.R. Leavis, "Tragedy and the 'Medium,'" *Scrutiny*, 12 (1944), 256.

[25] Leavis, p. 258.

[26] D.W. Harding, "The Poetry of Isaac Rosenberg," *Scrutiny*, 3 (1935), 363, quoted in Leavis, p. 259.

In addition, impersonality has its correlative in form, inasmuch as it assumes not only a willing receptiveness but an ability to give it a body. For Leavis, this "would seem to involve the poetic use of language," which is "not. . .a medium in which to put 'previously definite ideas', but for exploratory creation." It is a matter of "creating what it presents and as presenting something that stands there to speak for itself, or, rather, that isn't a matter of saying, but of being and enacting."[27] "Poetic" is, in this sense, dramatic. It is a form which reflects the heuristic process of the observer in dramatic encounter with his subject. And interestingly enough, Leavis, in discussing the "poetic" achievement of the Great Tradition, connects it to reverential attention, in a sense congruent with what we have discovered so far, as he notes that the great novelists "are all distinguished by a vital capacity for experience, a kind of reverent openness before life, and a marked moral intensity."[28]

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[27] Leavis, p. 256.

[28] Leavis, *The Great Tradition* (New York: New York University Press, 1969), p. 9.

We find an example of how reverence intersects with the tragic--and of the delicately heuristic resolution of involvement and judgement this involves--in George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*, or, more particularly, as it is embodied by Deronda himself. At the moment he first meets Mordecai, George Eliot describes his face as having "a forcible masculine gravity in its repose, that gave the value of judgement to the reverence with which he met the gaze of this mysterious son of poverty. . . ." That is, one can detect from his expression a keen sense of judgement encompassed by an overarching reverence. The next sentence is a restatement of this "more exquisite quality of Deronda's nature." It is "that keenly perceptive sympathetic emotiveness which ran along with his speculative tendency." It gives him, in the case of Mordecai, access "to a cry from the depths of another soul" to which he feels "the summons to be receptive instead of superciliously prejudging."[29]

But this balance is subjected to greater pressures and arrived at with greater difficulty in Deronda's dealings with Gwendolyn. We recall that, in circumstances strikingly similar to *The Scarlet Letter*, Deronda witnesses Gwendolyn's confession of her murderous hesitation when she not quite helplessly watched her husband drown in a boating accident. As she leads up to her confession, Deronda's affectionate desire to know Gwendolyn's mind is controlled by his patient and sympathetic receptivity in a way that reminds us how it can be, as George Eliot notes earlier in connection with Mordecai, "a rare and massive power, like fortitude."[30] As George Eliot observes of Deronda, "this long wandering with the poor conscience-stricken one over her past was difficult to bear, but he dared not urge her with a question. He must let her mind follow its own need."[31] Then, after the confession itself, we see how Deronda is capable of an exemplary, because a truly just, attention to fact:

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[29] George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), p. 553.

> It seemed almost certain that her murderous thought had had no outward effect--that, quite apart from it, the death was inevitable. Still, a question as to the outward effectiveness of a criminal desire dominant enough to impel even a momentary act, cannot alter our judgement of the desire; and Deronda shrank from putting that question forward in the first instance. He held it likely that Gwendolyn's remorse aggravated her inward guilt, and that she gave the character of decisive action to what had been an inappreciably instantaneous glance of desire. But her remorse was the precious sign of a recoverable nature; it was the culmination of that self-disapproval which had been the awakening of a new life within her; it marked her off from the criminals whose only regret is the failure to secure their evil wish. Deronda could not utter one word to diminish that sacred aversion to her worst self--that thorn-pressure which must come with the crowning of the sorrowful Better, suffering because of the Worse. All this mingled thought and feeling kept him silent: speech was too momentous to be ventured on rashly. There were no words of comfort that did not carry some sacrilege.[32]

Here we have a case of Deronda working his way toward and achieving the exact but highly precarious equipose implicit in and so crucial to loving the sinner and hating the sin. What most threatens to upset this balance is not the supercilious misrepresentation of Gwendolyn's action that would come from denying one's own sympathetic involvement with "that sacred aversion;" rather, it is the danger that this sympathy will issue in a questioning of the "outward effectiveness" of her action or even in a word of comfort, either of which would unjustly minimize the fact of Gwendolyn's worst self in action. One way to appreciate the justness of Deronda's silence, then, is to see it as an exact response to his discovery of the outward limits of a sympathy necessary to bring him into contact with Gwendolyn. It is a limit he must reverently and impersonally heed if he is not to distort, however benevolently, the truth.

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[30] Eliot, p. 553.
[31] Eliot, p. 757
[32] Eliot, p. 761-762.

That this sense of a tension between competing allegiances is essential to the notion of reverence can be most firmly and, I think, conclusively established if we consider Samuel Taylor Coleridge's statements on the subject. It is very convenient, for example, to find that, in *Table Talk*, Coleridge defines reverence as "the synthesis of love and fear."[33] Love is, indeed, something like the impetus to call forth the object and to enter into an intimate involvement with it. It is thus the motivating source of wonder and the desire to *know*. Fear, on the other hand, designates something like the fear of transgression and elicits a restrained and tactful distance, which is not inconsistent with a solicitous concern for accuracy and truth--nor, to refer back to Deronda, "that keenly perceptive sympathetic emotiveness which ran along with his speculative tendency."

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[33] T. Ashe, ed., *The Table Talk and Omniana of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1909), pp. 223-224. Coleridge complains: "There is now no reverence for anything; and the reason is, that men possess conceptions only, and all their knowledge is conceptional only. Now, as to conceive is a work of the mere understanding, and as all that can be conceived may be comprehended, it is impossible that a man should reverence that, to which he must feel something in himself superior. If it were possible to conceive God in a strict sense, that is, as we conceive a horse or a tree, even God himself could not excite any reverence, though he might excite fear or terror, or perhaps love, as a tiger or a beautiful woman. But reverence, which is the synthesis of love and fear, is only due from man, and, indeed, only excitable in man, towards ideal truths, which are always mysteries to the understanding, for the

And, as we might expect, this sense of reverence governs Coleridge's discussion elsewhere of the ethical limits of inquiry into character:

> Hence it is, that in every product of Nature from Comet and Coral up to Man and Woman there is that which can be understood, and a somewhat that cannot be understood--some things, arrangements, relations, that can be reduced to a Law, accounted for and on which we may calculate, and a somewhat that cannot be accounted [for] or even described intelligibly, because it has its source in that which is deeper than intelligence, and which lies underneath all assignable Reasons and Causes, as their common Ground.

Accordingly, Coleridge enjoins us to

> Reverence the *Individuality* of those you live among. Laugh if you like at Oddities, that are contrary to Reason, and condemn Caprices, that are most often no better than eruptions of a feverous Selfishness.... But then be sure that what you call Odd and Capricious may not be a Peculiarity connected with

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[33](cont'd) same reason that the motion of my finger behind my back is a mystery to you now--your eyes not being made for seeing through my body. It is the reason only which has a sense by which ideas can be recognized, and from the fontal light of ideas only can a man draw intellectual power." The passage is dated May 15, 1833.

> the individuality of the Person's Being and Character--and unintelligible to you because its source lies deeper than intelligence.

Then, he goes on to establish, in admittedly a rather curious fashion, what this kind of attention involves:

> Reverence the Individuality of your friend! It is the religion of a delicate Soul--and to ensure or facilitate the performance of the duty, it is no unimportant part of moral discretion to provide for this in every plan of co-habitation or of Intimacy next to domestic Familiarity, in the original sense of the word. To the eye of the World your establishment may appear a concentric circle---◎ with many circumferential lines but only one center. But in itself it must be a...close neighborhood of centers with a swelling outline formed by the segments of the outer circles. And the scheme then only promises success, when room is allowed for every point to have a small circumference of its own, so that the contraction to which each must consent in order to give space to the others, shall yet in no instance bring the circumferential line so close to the center of any radii [not?] to be describable in the interspaces.[34]

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This is a rather schematic and, hence, highly indelicate way to discuss the religion of a delicate soul and the practicalities of exercising moral discretion; nevertheless, the passage does not obscure Coleridge's awareness that reverence, as the sympathetic apprehension of the essentially individual, involves the capacity to perceive boundaries--those "small circumferences" which mark off "that which can be understood" from a "somewhat that cannot be understood." Moreover, ~~it~~ also involves, for Coleridge, a surrender to the fact of the fundamental separateness of other persons, a sense finally imposed on us by an awareness that another person does escape one's knowledge and is, in fact, beyond it--that, in turn, one's claim to *know*, in a way that we have all felt before in our most intimate moments, can be arrogative and tyrannizing. And so, again, by way of offering advice to lovers, Coleridge says, in a much plainer statement:

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[34] Kathleen Coburn, ed., *Inquiring Spirit: A New Presentation of Coleridge from his Published and Unpublished Prose Writings*, rev. ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), p. 309. These passages are taken from a previously unpublished manuscript.

> Agree beforehand, nay, if in the fulness of your love and oneheartedness it should require invention and contrivance, yet invent, contrive that there shall be some points, some things respecting which you are to continue single. Be assured that these exceptions will strengthen the rule--and that this abstinence, these interposed Fasts of Sympathy are more favorable to its longevity--*a fortiori* in all looser ties.[35]

Thus, Coleridge's "synthesis of love and fear" invites restatement in terms that have emerged already in this discussion--it is intelligible as the coexistence of involvement and judgement, of the desire to know and not to know. And the demands of adjusting "oneheartedness" to assertions of singularity are enough to suggest something of the scale and intensity of tension that reverence, as the concern for true judgement, accommodates. Indeed, the bare notion of "tension" and the instability that goes along with it does not really do justice to the tragic potential of the conflict between love and fear. It seems particularly appropriate, for example, to describe the tragic action of

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[35] Coburn, ed., pp. 310-311.

Othello in terms of this conflict, in which love overwhelms the limits imposed by fear on an appallingly passionate level--and on a quieter but nonetheless tragic note, one recalls Elizabeth Bates' painful recovery of this synthesis in D.H. Lawrence's "Odour of Chrysanthemums."

We are in a better position now to see how Hawthorne's conception of reverence fits in with these considerations, and, more specifically, how "curiosity", for him, would represent a disruption of a necessary balance of involvement and judgement, of love and fear. First of all, it is worth noting that Hawthorne's judgement of curiosity, as it appears in the passage from *The Scarlet Letter*, is hardly novel, and we can more readily appreciate the force of his judgement in the light of the long and rich tradition, both classical and Christian, which treats curiosity as the mark of an evil mind. St. Augustine, for example, takes a representative position in his characterization of "curiosity" as the "lust of the eyes." That is, it is "the lust to find out and know" simply for the pleasure that is taken in knowing and seeing and is, consequently, "the empty desire to possess" the objects of one's attention. This, as Augustine goes on to point out, is the spirit behind our fascination over "the mangled corpse" and the reason why we put "monsters and anything out of the ordinary. . . on show in our theatres." Curiosity is also a spirit which corrupts learning, "for men proceed to investigate the workings of nature which is beyond our ken--things which it does no good to know and which men only want to know for the sake of knowing." And for the same reason, it corrupts religion as well: "God is tempted when signs and portents are demanded and are not desired for any salutary purpose but simply for the experience of seeing them." Accordingly, insofar as we succumb "to the invasion of idle empty thoughts," we find that "our great and serious purpose" of devotion to God "is broken off."[34]

But Hawthorne's concerns are more directly reflected by Jeremy Taylor in his remarks on curiosity--which are, incidentally, a very close adaption of Plutarch. Taylor's focus is the all too familiar phenomenon of the busy-body, who presents to us a particularly ugly form of the empty desire to possess. Taylor argues very simply and directly that we have trouble enough in our lives for us to hanker after the affairs of others. What do we care, to use his examples, if our neighbour's grandfather is a Syrian or if his grandmother were an illegitimate child, or if so-and-so is in debt, or whether or not his wife has expensive tastes? Yet such matters do concern "commonly curious persons, or (as the Apostle's phrase is) '*busy-bodies*'," who, as Taylor points out,

> are not solicitous or inquisitive into the beauty and order of a well-governed family, or after the virtues of an excellent person; but if there be anything for which men keep locks and bars, and porters, things that blush to see the light, and either

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[34] Rex Warner, trans., *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, 10.35 (New York: New American Library, 1963).

> are shameful in manners, or private in nature, these things are their care and business.[37]

They cannot find pleasure by inquiring into the more ordinary phenomena of nature; rather,

> they must feed upon Tragedies, and stories of misfortunes and crimes: and yet tell them ancient stories of the ravishment of chaste maidens, or the debauchment of nations, or the extreme poverty of learned persons, or the persecutions of the old saints, or the changes of government, and sad accidents happening in Royal families amongst the *Arsacidae*, the *Caesars*, the *Ptolemies*, these were enough to scratch the itch of knowing sad stories: but unless you tell them something *sad and new*, something that is done within the bounds of their own knowledge and relation, it seems tedious and unsatisfying; which shows plainly it is an evil spirit: envy and idleness married together, and begot curiosity. Therefore, *Plutarch* rarely well compares curious and inquisitive ears to the execrable gates of cities, out of which only Malefactors and Hangmen and Tragedies pass--nothing that is chaste and holy. If a Physician should go from house to house unsent for, and enquire what woman hath a cancer in her bowels, or what man hath a fistula in his colic-gut, though he would pretend to cure it, he would be almost as unwelcome as the disease itself: and therefore it is inhuman to inquire after crimes and disasters without pretence of amending them, but only to discover them.[38]

Thus for Taylor, curiosity is, in an Augustinian note, a "direct incontinency of spirit," for the curious man actively seeks a supercilious security in wilful misconstruction--but can only be secure at the expense of not only a true understanding of the object of his attention but of his own humanity as well.

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[37] Jeremy Taylor, *The Rule and Exercises of Holy Living* (London: William Pickering, 1847) pp. 125-126. See W.C. Hembold, trans., *Plutarch's Moralia*, VI, 515B-523B (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1939).

[38] Taylor, pp. 126-127.

It is interesting, in this light, to note how Isabel Archer, in *The Portrait of a Lady*, resists and judges this empty desire to possess, when she refuses to speculate upon the antipathy that seems to exist between Madame Merle and Ralph Touchett:

> There was something between them, Isabel said to herself, but she said nothing more than this. If it were something of importance, it should inspire respect; if it were not it was not worth her curiosity. With all her love of knowledge she had a natural shrinking from raising curtains and looking into unlighted corners. The love of knowledge co-existed in her mind with the finest capacity for ignorance.[39]

To be sure, there is a Coleridgean echo here, inasmuch as "love", in the Coleridgean sense, takes the form of a "love for knowledge"--but only remains so insofar as it coexists with a restraining fear, as is implied by "the finest capacity for ignorance." It is also interesting to see how the same sense of a balanced attentiveness passes over into Hawthorne's famous definition of the Unpardonable Sin in the company of an explicit reference to "reverence":

> The Unpardonable Sin might consist in a want of love and reverence for the Human Soul; in consequence of which, the investigator pried into its dark depths, not with a hope or purpose of making it better, but from a cold philosophical curiosity,--content that it should be wicked in whatever kind or degree, and only desiring to study it out.[40]

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[39] Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p. 199.

[40] Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The American Notebooks*, ed. Claude M. Simpson (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1972), p. 251.

The Unpardonable Sin is, indeed, no different in principle from the less Faustian curiosity of fish-wives, for both, in their different degrees, reflect "a want of love and reverence for the Human Soul." Reverence is not simply, as this context might suggest, the principle of sympathetic restraint but a precedent and enabling receptiveness which subserves the end of the true understanding of character. It accordingly implies the subordination of all selfish interest. It is the antithesis of the aggressive possessiveness so characteristic of Hawthorne's sinful investigators.

Such is, one feels, the final understanding achieved, for example, by Holgrave, in *The House of the Seven Gables*, as he resists the temptation to commit the Unpardonable Sin against Phoebe Pyncheon, whom he holds in a mesmeric spell:

> To a disposition like Holgrave's, at once speculative and active, there is no temptation so great as the opportunity of acquiring empire over the human spirit; nor any idea more seductive to a young man than to become the arbiter of a young girl's destiny. Let us, therefore--whatever his defects of nature and education, and in spite of his scorn for creeds and institutions--concede to the Daguerrotypist the rare and high quality of reverence for another's individuality. Let us allow him integrity, also, forever after to be confided in; since he forbade himself to twine that one link more, which might have rendered his spell over Phoebe indissoluble.[41]

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[41] Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The House of the Seven Gables*, ed. William Charvat (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1965), p. 212. Hawthorne makes the connection between reverence and mesmerism clear in a letter to his wife-to-be in which he strongly objects to her association with a certain "magnetic lady," a Mrs. Park. From Brook Farm, he writes: "I am unwilling that a power should be exercised on thee, of which we know neither the origin nor the

That is, Holgrave's empty desire to possess draws Phoebe more and more into his knowledge and control but runs up against--and is restrained and purified by--his perception of her fundamental and necessary separateness. Coleridge's injunction to "Reverence the Individuality of your friend" is obviously relevant here and, as a result, we may feel safely inclined to construe Holgrave's reverence for another's individuality as an instance of "oneheartedness" giving way, in due measure, to a care for singularity. It is a love which becomes genuinely caring by finding its limit in fear--or, in James' terms, the finest capacity for ignorance,--a limit, one should stress, that cannot be discovered without the aggressive possessiveness of the love for knowledge.

Miles Coverdale, too, in *The Blithedale Romance*, achieves, in a far more qualified sense, this understanding when he overhears Hollingsworth praying in his room:

> My sleeping room being thinly partitioned from his, the solemn murmur of his voice made its way to my

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[41] (cont'd) consequence, and the phenomena of which seem calculated to bewilder us, than to teach us any truths about the present or future state of being. If I possessed such a power over thee, I should not dare exercise it; nor can I consent to its being exercised by another. Supposing that this power arises from the transfusion of one spirit into another, it seems to me that the sacredness of an individual is violated by it; there would be an intrusion into thy holy of holies--and the intruder would not be thy husband!...And thou wilt know that the view I take of this matter is caused by no want of faith in mysteries, but from a deep reverence of the soul, and of the mysteries which it knows within itself, but never transmits to the earthly eye or ear." "To Sophia Peabody," 18 October, 1841, Letter 216, *The Letters, 1813-1843*, eds. Thomas Woodson, *et al.* (Columbus: Ohio State University, 1985), pp. 588-590.

> ears, compelling me to be an auditor of his awful privacy with his Creator. It affected me with a deep reverence for Hollingsworth which no familiarity then existing, or that afterwards grew more intimate between us,--no, nor my subsequent perception of his own great errors--ever quite effaced.[42]

For Coverdale, reverence is an attitude which emerges from his sympathetic apprehension of the moral limits of knowledge and judgement. One must regard this as a qualified achievement simply because we are aware of how consistently Coverdale strays from this standard throughout the novel. In fact, he distinguishes himself as energetically and possessively curious about the affairs of Hollingsworth, Zenobia and Priscilla--and if he is ultimately a harmless intruder, it is because the other characters are more than equal to his genteel but nonetheless impertinent invasions. Still, in this particular instance, he rises to the occasion, perhaps because Hollingsworth's "awful privacy" is imposed on him--and once confronted with it, he is implicitly aware that it eludes his possession and, thus, he keeps his proper distance.

Accordingly, we cannot share Richard Brodhead's sense of surprise at Hawthorne's refusal to describe Dimmesdale's revelation unless, of course, we are surprised by an exceptional attention to fact. For we can now judge the curiosity we feel--and the curiosity Hawthorne both arouses and anticipates--as the irreverent desire to possess.

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[42] Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Blithedale Romance and Fanshawe*, eds. Roy Harvey Pierce and Fredson Bowers (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 1972), p. 39.

Hawthorne's demurrer, thus, takes its full weight as a "scrupulous hesitancy or objection"--not, that is, as a scrupulous concern for the epistemological problems raised by the nature of literary form, as Brodhead would have us understand. Instead, we find that Hawthorne, speaking in his capacity as story-teller, enjoins us to take the attitude that Holgrave and Coverdale do. And if Hawthorne, as Brodhead says, "draws the curtain before our eyes" he does so out of the same *reverent* concern Isabel Archer shows (for we can characterize Isabel's motive in this way now) when she refuses to look behind a curtain already drawn.

Thus, our perception of Hawthorne's gesture as an instance of reverent attention implies the perception of reverence as a principle of style. Here, the principle is found in the suppression of the very details that Brodhead feels cheated of. But if we do feel cheated, we are also aware that there is no more direct a response to the lust of the eyes than a gesture like Hawthorne's, which, ultimately, serves to protect Dimmesdale through striking that delicate equipoise of love and fear. This motive and the necessary connection it has with style is clear to J.V. Cunningham whose remarks in "The Journal of John Carden" directly illuminate what Hawthorne is doing in *The Scarlet Letter*:

> To what extent does scandal reside in the dissemination of specific circumstances, of realistic detail, which invite the hearer to reenact the scene and at the same time offer to his attention those items of commonness and vulgarity which qualify the generalities of passion, evil, or social mischance that were the basis of scandal? In these latter some

> dignity is to be found, at least in the generality of application to others, and in private surmise to the hearer's self. But realistic detail impedes this effect, localizes the general in the particular places, times, and persons concerned, and makes it difficult for one to conceive that this could happen to him who is not those persons nor was in those times and places. So the foundation for sympathy is displaced and there is left chiefly the malice of discomfort at this disturbance of one's social security; the threat to oneself, being suppressed, grows malignant, and the arrogance of spiritual superiority is given full scope.[43]

Hawthorne's suppression of detail in Dimmesdale's case is thus appropriate and necessary--but has even greater force behind it when it is considered in the wider context of the action of the story.

For example, we see how it is the enforced exposure and dreadful specificity of Hester Prynne's scarlet letter which displaces the sympathy due to her and how she is accordingly victimized by the spiritual arrogance of the scandalized community. In her the generalities of passion and evil are almost entirely localized so that she becomes, in the eyes of the community, the embodiment of sin. Her victimization in turn calls our attention to just how readily--and on a scale that is social and cultural--the "love of knowledge" deteriorates into an idle and malicious curiosity, unqualified by the sense of fearful restraint implied by "the finest capacity for ignorance." We recall, indeed, the old crones who superciliously gaze at Hester Prynne's exposed letter as she stands on the scaffold at the beginning of the tale. There are the countless others who stare at Hester's mark of sin with the cold familiarity of idle curiosity. There is the man who exults, in answer to Roger Chillingworth's query as to why Hester is on the scaffold:

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[43] Cunningham, "The Journal of John Cardan," in *The Collected Essays*, pp. 425-426.

> 'Truly, friend, and methinks it must gladden your heart, after your troubles and sojourn in the wilderness,...to find yourself, at length, in a land where iniquity is searched out, and punished in the sight of rulers and people; as here in our godly New England.' (62)

The connection between a kind of lust for detail and a possessive arrogance evident in these examples is clearer still with Chillingworth himself who, unlike Holgrave, does give in to the temptations of knowledge. And even Hester's and Dimmesdale's adultery takes its appropriate place in the story as another instance of the sin of curiosity. In this, Hawthorne appears to share Jeremy Taylor's judgement, for Taylor says, again following Plutarch, that "adultery itself in its principle is many times nothing but a curious inquisition after, and envy of another man's enclosed pleasures."[44] Moreover, it is a mutual curiosity that Dimmesdale has in mind when he says to Hester, moments before his death on the scaffold, that "we violated our reverence for each other's soul."(256)

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[44] Taylor, p. 127. See *Plutarch's Moralia*, 519B-C: "Another good law was that of the legislator of Thurii, for he forbade the lampooning on the comic stage of all citizens except adulterers and busybodies. And indeed adultery does seem to be a sort of curiosity about another's pleasure and a searching out and examination of matters which are closely guarded and escape general observation, while curiosity is an encroaching, a debauching and denuding of secret things."

On the other hand, Hawthorne also makes us keenly aware that there is a *due* particularity, for Dimmesdale, prior to his confession, shows how his own compensatory suppression of details can be purely hypocritical, in which the generalities of passion and evil are emptied of their specific content. His colleagues who witness his revelation show, as well, how fear may retreat into a willed ignorance, as we recognize in their deliberate misconstruction of what Dimmesdale has done. In this light, Hawthorne's statement--"it was revealed! But it were irreverent to describe that revelation."--represents a critical retreat from these two extremes as it strikes a normative balance between a necessary revelation of fact and a necessary concealment, of, that is, judgement and involvement or, finally, of loving the sinner and hating the sin.

This discussion of style, however, leads us finally to understand how reverence intersects with the style of the man of society. For the reverential synthesis of love and fear is at the core of the definition of the gentleman as it would be understood in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and as it may be detected in the modesty and reserve of the gentleman's style. In this light, Coleridge, Henry James, Daniel Deronda, as he is conceived by George Eliot, and George Eliot herself may be linked with Hawthorne as reflecting the aims of a cultural ideal of intelligence.

This synthesis is implicit, for example, in Richard Steele's definition of the gentleman, in whom we may expect to find "a clear Understanding, a Reason free from Prejudice, a steady Judgement and an extensive Knowledge" and, at the same time, a heart which "is firm and intrepid, void of all inordinate Passions, and full of Tenderness, Compassion and Benevolence."[45] This eighteenth century formulation readily translates into the nineteenth century's awareness that "the gentleman," as J.R. Vernon says, "is just and, also generous to others;"[46] he, that is, "gives to all their due, of respect, consideration, honour, praise, blame, admiration, forbearance." And he is "large-hearted, tender, merciful" out of a due sympathy founded upon "the knowledge of the war of the noble and base within himself."[47] Moreover, as Vernon points out, justice and generosity are the inseparable, cooperative, and mutually defining motives which form the ground of true judgement. Of each, Vernon goes on to say:

> neither *first*, neither before the other, but both together and at once. It is a mistake to suppose that one can exist without the other. Is he really a just man who has no mercy nor kindliness, who cannot take into account the 'delicate differences,' the numerous possibilities of acts and motives? More obviously the unjust man cannot be truly generous.[48]

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[45] John Calhoun Stephens, ed., *The Guardian*, No. 34, (20 April, 1714) (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1982), p. 143.
[46] Vernon, p. 565.
[47] Vernon, p. 566.
[48] Vernon, p. 565.

Charles Kingsley, in this light, provides us with the classic formulation of this balance of justness and generosity in his adaptation of St. Paul, who, in his turn, is traditionally regarded as the paradigm of the Christian gentleman:

> Charity suffers long, and is kind: charity does not envy: charity does not boast, is not puffed up; does not behave itself unseemly; that is, is never rude, or overbearing, or careless about hurting people's feelings by hard words or looks: seeketh not its own; that is, is not always standing on its own rights, and thinking about itself, and trying to help itself: is not easily provoked: thinketh no evil; that is, is not suspicious, ready to make out the worst case against every one: rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; that is, is not glad, as too many are, to see people do wrong, and to laugh and sneer over their own failings; but rejoiceth in the truth, tries to find out the truth about every one, and judge them honestly, and make fair allowances for them: covereth all things; that is, tries to hide a neighbor's sins as far as is right, instead of gossiping over them, and blazoning them up and down, as too many do.‘’

That is, charity and candour are the cooperative and inseparable constituents of true judgement. And we readily see that Kingsley shares Vernon's understanding that neither is *first* and that they coexist as mutually qualifying vectors of perception which compel a submissive receptiveness to the revelation of character.

Hawthorne makes his commitment to these aims explicit as he takes the opportunity to defend himself against the charge of "egotism" in his prefaces. The charge itself would be enough to provoke any self-respecting gentleman to defend

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‘’Charles Kingsley, "Sermon XX: The True Gentleman," in his *Sermons for the Times* (New York: Dana, 1856), pp. 310-311.

himself, for as Vernon says, ". . . of all the qualities that a gentleman must *not* have," it is "pride, especially." Hawthorne himself says:

> ...as to egotism, a person, who has been burrowing, to his utmost ability, into the depths of our common nature, for the purposes of psychological romance,--and who pursues his researches in that dusky region, as he needs must, as well by the tact of sympathy as by the light of observation,--will smile at incurring such an imputation....[50]

Hawthorne's combination of "the tact of sympathy" with "the light of observation," of course, provides us with yet another restatement of the aims of the gentleman and of the balance of cares that go into the definition of reverential attention. That this kind of attention issues in, according to Hawthorne's conception, the action of "burrowing" and "pursuing one's researches" perhaps does not properly suggest the lightness of touch that goes along with a heuristic receptivity. But Sophia Hawthorne strikes an appropriate note when she describes the essentially reverential openness evident in Hawthorne's creative practice--in effect, his style--when she observes:

> When [Hawthorne] is evolving a work of art, he waits upon the light in such a purely simple way that I do not wonder at the perfection of each of his stories. It is real inspiration and few are reverent enough and patient enough to wait for it as he does....[51]

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[50] Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Snow Image and Uncollected Tales*, eds. L. Neal Smith and J. Donald Crowley (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1974), p. 4.

[51] Sophia Hawthorne, "Introductory Note," *Mosses from an Old Manse* (Boston, 1900), as quoted in Eigner, p. 23.

This sense of reverent and patient evolution is what chiefly struck Herman Melville about Hawthorne's style, as is clear in his famous review of *Mosses from an Old Manse*. Out of a no doubt old fashioned but nonetheless sound conviction that one reads the man in his style, Melville adduces the following passage from Hawthorne's otherwise forgettable sketch, "The Intelligence Office," as evidence of the true temper of Hawthorne's mind:

> A man now entered, in neglected attire, with the aspect of a thinker, but somewhat too rough-hewn and brawny for a scholar. His face was full of sturdy vigor, with some finer and keener attribute beneath; though harsh at first, it was tempered with the glow of a large, warm heart, which had force enough to heat his powerful intellect through and through. He advanced to the Intelligencer, and looked at him with a glance of such stern sincerity, that perhaps few secrets were beyond its scope.
> 'I seek the Truth,' said he.[52]

That is, as Melville points out, Hawthorne exhibits here "that lasting temper of all true, candid men--a seeker and not a finder yet."[53] This is a quality of mind suggestive of the profoundly impersonal receptivity of Isaac Rosenberg, which issues in the poetic exploration of experience. The commanding and directing emphasis on "yet" strengthens the connection because it indicates a disposition not to stand in premature and oversimplified judgement, which a withdrawal into "finding" at the expense of the qualification and enrichment afforded by "seeking" would imply.

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[52] Herman Melville, "Hawthorne and his Mosses," in Jay Leyda, ed., *The Portable Melville* (New York: The Viking Press, 1952), p. 416.

[53] Leyda, p. 416.

Moreover, in the light of the entire discussion so far, we can recognize that seeking and not finding yet is a way of conceiving the natural form that reverential attention takes. And we can call it reverential attention because, in Melville's terms, the action of seeking and not finding yet is motivated by the enabling cooperation of "a powerful intellect" and "a large, warm heart." And like Julian Hawthorne, Melville would make the very largest claims for this quality of mind, inasmuch as Hawthorne could achieve, as Melville wrote in a letter to Hawthorne, "the apprehension of the absolute condition of present things as they strike the eye of the man who fears them not, though they do their worst to him, . . ."[54] But the final thing we need to note and stress about the passage that Melville discusses is that Hawthorne's seeker of truth, with his "powerful intellect" and his "large, warm heart," has the unmistakable cut of a gentleman--and that, as Melville surely recognized, seeking the truth is the province of the gentleman.

Nevertheless, the degree to which we must qualify this praise is something I hope to raise in the next chapter, which deals specifically with the connection between reverential attention and Hawthorne's style in "The Custom House." Indeed, what will emerge is a significant indication of the difficulties Hawthorne had in maintaining a reverent perspective. In spite of his obvious commitment to this virtue, we will see how these difficulties are of a character that takes us beyond the normal instability inherent to reverence and how they are, at critical moments, beyond Hawthorne's awareness and control.

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[54] "To Nathaniel Hawthorne," 16? April?, 1851, Letter 83, *The Letters of Herman Melville*, eds. Merrill R. Davis and William H. Gilman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), p. 124.

III. The Gentlemanly Style and "The Custom-House"

It is important to discuss "The Custom House" sketch before taking up *The Scarlet Letter* itself because we need to develop a little further how the ways in which Hawthorne's gentlemanly and, hence, reverential intelligence could conform to Melville's account of Hawthorne as a "seeker and not a finder yet." A close reading of the style in "The Custom House" will, in fact, help to clarify and establish the heuristic capacities of the gentlemanly style. At the same time, however, it will also reveal to us something of the perplexing coexistence in Hawthorne's style of conflicting and unresolved intentions. That is, we detect, on the one hand, a finely articulated quality of reverent attention but we also detect, on the other, what we must characterize as a distinctly irreverent undercurrent which deflects against this standard. It is a coexistence which has damaging implications. For we note the frequency with which Hawthorne loses his sense of the delicate balance of judgement and feeling essential to reverence and lapses into the imbalanced attention which characterizes sentimentality.

Nevertheless, one can see how plainly Hawthorne asserts his presence in the sketch as a gentleman seeker of truth. For example, as a prelude to his treatment of the old Inspector, Hawthorne gives an explicit account of the assumptions and predispositions which guide his inquiries into the character of any man:

> Unless people are more than commonly disagreeable, it is my foolish habit to contract a kindness for them. The better part of my companion's character, if it have a better part, is that which usually comes uppermost in my regard, and forms the type whereby I recognize the man.(15)

This is the profession, of course, if we discount the world-weary note, of the gentleman's charitable regard for others as we have seen it defined in the previous chapter and which has an exact correspondence with the aims of reverential attention. That is, Hawthorne is ever ready to make fair allowances to character, "if it have a better part," and yet is equally ready to judge honestly. He expresses his commitment to the balanced attention embodied by the gentleman, who, to turn to J.R. Vernon again, is "forebearing, but not slovenly, nor passing over that which should be noticed. . . . Beauties, not deformities or flaws, the more readily catch his eye."[55] Put another way, Hawthorne presents himself as a the true gentleman who subserves the interest of and concern for accuracy and truth. Hence the appropriateness and necessity of selflessly keeping, in Hawthorne's words, "the inmost Me behind its veil," in the service of the disinterested illumination of moral character.(4) This is the reverence bound up in the very notion of the gentleman--an interest in character motivated by affection and qualified by a discriminating fear. And, of course, if Hawthorne is a true gentleman, we will see it in his style, for this is how we know we are in the company of a gentleman.

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[55] Vernon, p.566

One obvious and relatively crude form that reverential attention takes is the simple device of the pro-con argument. For example, reflecting on what he has said of the customs officers, Hawthorne remarks:

> It would be a sad injustice, the reader must understand, to represent all my excellent old friends as in their dotage. In the first place, my coadjutors were not invariably old;...

And so on; some are in their prime, full of energy and ability, and superior to a career in the Custom House. Others, though aged, still have their wits about them. Then Hawthorne, with a characteristic touch of ceremonious care, turns the corner:

> But, as respects the majority of my corps of veterans, there will be no wrong done, if I characterize them generally....

After which judgement follows firmly and harshly, but to which we nevertheless acquiesce:

> as a set of wearisome old souls, who had gathered nothing worth preservation from their varied experience of life. They seemed to have flung away all the golden grain of practical wisdom, which they had enjoyed so many opportunities of harvesting, and most carefully to have stored their memories with the husks.(16)

In the case of the old Inspector, we see that Hawthorne has modified this form to reflect a response to the relative complexity of the Inspector's character--or, if complexity is not the right word, at least a response to the fact that the Inspector is a "rare phenomenon"--and, in addition, a record of the affectionate wondering such a phenomenon arouses. What we get is not so much an enumeration of arguments in favor of one side which are to be dismissed by an enumeration of opposing arguments; instead, we get a sense of an exploratory unfolding of a character, of beginning with an impression and evolving it.

Let us, then, consider how this stretch of "The Custom House" Sketch moves. It begins with an acknowlegement of genuine amazement with the Inspector:

> This Inspector, when I first knew him, was a man of fourscore years, or thereabouts, and certainly one of the most wonderful specimens of winter-green that you would be likely to discover in a lifetime's search.(16-17)

And, then, with wondering attention, he portrays a character in motion, showing a studious avoidance of pre-emptive judgement in conjunction with, even because of, a studious inclusiveness and specificity:

> With his florid cheek, his compact figure, smartly arrayed in a bright-buttoned blue coat, his brisk and vigorous step, and his hale and hearty aspect, altogether, he seemed--not young, indeed--but a kind of new contrivance of Mother Nature in the shape of man, whom age and infirmity had no business to touch. His voice and his laugh, which perpetually reechoed through the Custom-House, had nothing of the tremulous quaver and cackle of an old man's utterance; they came strutting out of his lungs, like the crow of a cock, or the blast of a clarion.

Next, Hawthorne gathers in and reflects upon what he has observed:

> Looking at him merely as an animal,--and there was very little else to look at,--he was a most satisfactory object, from the thorough healthfulness and wholesomeness of his system, and his capacity, at that extreme age, to enjoy all, or nearly all, the delights which he had ever aimed at, or conceived of.

Now, as we can see, even as Hawthorne draws upon and enforces the preceding affectionate, even admiring portrait of the Inspector, he introduces a disturbance in the feeling of his remarks by the obvious discordance of the parenthetical thrust, "--and there was very little else to look at--." There is, perhaps, a sense in which we feel that Hawthorne is signalling, in the premeditated fashion of concession and rebuttal, a turning of the corner from pro to con. But there is more clearly a sense that it is an unpremeditated turn that is announced at the precise moment the perception of the need to make a qualification occurs. We are, I think, to construe the line of thought in something like the following way: we find Hawthorne narrowing his focus to a consideration of the Inspector as *merely* an animal--as if to make clear by "merely" that there is, of course, more to him than his animal vitality in the sense that this would be true of anyone. But the very thought leads to the perception of the other possibility that there is, in fact, very little else to discover about him--hence, the parenthesis, which records a spontaneous adjustment of thought to subject and which as a result introduces another line of inquiry into the Inspector's character even as it appears that Hawthorne has exhausted his subject.

The parenthetical afterthought is then picked up and developed as Hawthorne tries to pick out the reasons for the old Inspector's "healthfulness and wholesomeness:"

> The careless security of his life in the Custom-House, on a regular income, and with but slight and infrequent apprehensions of removal, had no doubt contributed to make time pass lightly over him. The original and more potent causes, however, lay in the rare perfection of his animal nature, the moderate proportion of intellect, and the very trifling admixture of moral and spiritual ingredients; these latter qualities, indeed, being in barely enough measure to keep the old gentleman from walking on all-fours. He possessed no power of thought, no depth of feeling, no troublesome sensibilities; nothing, in short, but a few common place instincts, which, aided by the cheerful temper that grew inevitably out of his physical well-being, did duty very respectably, and to general acceptance, in lieu of a heart.(17)

What we noticed before, then, as a disturbance in feeling is now fully drawn out into a supporting and justifying image of radical limitation which threatens to overwhelm the value Hawthorne places on the old man's natural and charming spontaneity. However, that each side is consistent with the rare perfection of his animal nature is developed one stage further by the same studious inclusiveness:

> He had been the husband of three wives, all long since dead; the father of twenty children, most of whom, at every age of childhood and maturity, had likewise returned to dust. Here, one would suppose, might have been sorrow enough to imbue the sunniest disposition, through and through, with a sable tinge. Not so with our Inspector! One brief sigh

> sufficed to carry off the entire burden of these dismal reminiscences. The next moment, he was ready for sport as any unbreeched infant; far readier than the Collector's junior clerk, who, at nineteen years, was much the elder and graver man of the two.(17-18)

So we now see, with this final recourse to specificity, that our perception of the Inspector's limitations is inseparable from our perception of his virtues. We perceive each side of the Inspector's rare perfection, indeed, as they are present at once in a living image of a man in action.

The image, I think, speaks for itself, but we feel that Hawthorne's final assessment of the old man is a perfect accord of perception and feeling; we feel that this is what he *is*--in figure and significance:

> He was, in truth, a rare phenomenon; so perfect in one point of view; so shallow, so delusive, so impalpable, such an absolute non entity, in every other. My conclusion was that he had no soul, no heart, no mind; nothing, as I have already said, but instincts; and yet, withal, so cunningly had the few materials of his character been put together, that there was no painful perception of deficiency, but, on my part, an entire contentment with what I found in him.(18)

And this contact with what the old man *is* guides all of Hawthorne's subsequent comments upon him:

> One point, in which he had vastly the advantage over his four-footed brethren, was his ability to recollect the good dinners which it had made no small portion of the happiness of his life to eat. His gourmandism was a highly agreeable trait; and to hear him talk of roast-meat was as appetizing as a pickle or an oyster. As he possessed no higher attribute, and neither sacrificed nor vitiated any spiritual endowment by devoting all his energies and ingenuities to subserve the delight and profit of

> his maw, it always pleased and satisfied me to hear him expatiate on fish, poultry, and butcher's meat, and the most eligible methods of preparing them for the table. His reminiscences of good cheer, however ancient the date of the actual banquet, seemed to bring the savor of pig or turkey under one's very nostrils. There were flavors on his palate, that had lingered there not less than sixty or seventy years, and were still apparently as fresh as that of the mutton-chop which he had just devoured for his breakfast. I have heard him smack his lips over dinners, every guest at which, except himself, had long been food for worms.(18-19)

Hawthorne takes sheer delight in the old man in the way a gentleman can. For the gentleman makes an active effort to give free and full attention to the virtues--"Beauties, not deformities or flaws, the more readily catch his eye"--without compromising his necessary disapproval of the limitations; again, he is "forbearing, but not slovenly, not passing over that which should be noticed." Hawthorne thus takes an uncompromised pleasure in the old man's vitality--without, that is, expressing a feeling in excess of the facts.

Indeed, the accuracy of perception this implies is hard, if not impossible, to separate from justness of feeling. We realize with Hawthorne, that the old man does not pose a great test of affection and involvement, for any such challenge, in addition to the affection that one feels, is limited by the limitations of the character--one dare not ask or expect anything more of him than the pleasure he gives--so that the just response is a warmth complicated by a necessary distance, which is nevertheless easy to maintain. We also see that the precision of judgement and its necessary accompaniment, precision of feeling, further implies a capacity to perceive *differences* and this helps us to account for the particular range of feeling Hawthorne's prose in "The Custom-House" is capable of. There is, for example, the mild ridicule of the customs officers in general:

> Sagaciously, under their spectacles, did they peep into the holds of vessels! Mighty was their fuss about little matters, and marvellous, sometimes, the obtuseness that allowed greater ones to slip between their fingers!(15)

But this is authorized by the fact that they *are* mildly ridiculous. The statement both discovers and reveals the extent of it. At the other extreme is the felt respect for the truly heroic, in the case of General Miller:

> What I saw in him--as evidently as the indestructable ramparts of Old Ticonderoga, already cited as the most appropriate simile--were the features of stubborn and ponderous endurance, which might well have amounted to obstinacy in his earlier days; of integrity, that, like most of his other endowments, lay in a somewhat heavy mass, and was just as unmalleable and unmanageable as a ton of iron ore; and of benevolence, which, fiercely as he led the bayonets on at Chippewa or Fort Erie, I take to be of quite as genuine a stamp as what actuates any or all the polemical philanthropists of the age. He had slain men with his own hand, for aught I know;--certainly, they had fallen, like blades of grass at the sweep of the scythe, before the charge to which his spirit imparted its triumphant energy.(22)

And there is, accordingly, a felt sense of his incongruous presence in the Custom-House:

> The evolutions of the parade; the tumult of the battle; the flourish of old, heroic music, heard

> thirty years before;--such scenes and sounds, perhaps, were all alive before his intellectual sense. Meanwhile, the merchants and ship-masters, the spruce clerks, and uncouth sailors, entered and departed; the bustle of this commercial and Custom-House life kept up its little murmur round about him; and neither with the men nor their affairs did the General appear to sustain the most distant relation. He was as much out of place as an old sword--now rusty, but which had flashed once in the battle's front, and showed still a bright gleam along its blade--would have been, among the inkstands, paper-folders, and mahogany rulers, on the Deputy Collector's desk.(23)

These examples, along with the delight Hawthorne shows with the old man, give each other a sort of mutual definition and resonance which disappears when they are lifted out of their immediate context. But the discussion so far is sufficient, I think, to suggest that there is a richness and variety to life in the Custom-House which is accessible to the man of society's discriminating and affectionate curiosity.

But this accessibility, to return to the claim at the head of this discussion of the Inspector, is ultimately, inseparable from a particularly *enabling* form which is, in turn, the natural consequence or extension of the virtue of reverence. Reverence takes the shape and movement of exploratory inquiry, which involves following a subject's motions, noting this inclination, and that disposition as each may come to light in one's experience with the subject. Also involved is a preparedness to adjust and to qualify one's feeling in the interest of final precision, which we always feel is a matter of discovery motivated by the observer's moral concern for the integrity of the other than himself.

The precision of judgement and feeling that Hawthorne arrives at in his portrait of the Inspector, depends, finally and fundamentally, upon the enabling reverence of the gentleman, although we do not feel Hawthorne's presence as a gentleman *per se* so much as we are simply aware of his activity as in Melville's illuminating phrase, "a seeker and not a finder yet."

The activity of seeking and not finding yet is, of course, reflected in the finer details of style in addition to the larger units of structure; but, indeed, as we have seen, it is impossible to discuss the movement and order of reverential inquiry without discussing it in terms of some of the minutely specific traits which give body to that movement and order. We have already been compelled, for example, to call attention to the inclusiveness and plenitude of detail and to certain flexes of syntax in Hawthorne's sketch of the Inspector. But, by implication, such details, in their turn, may well be instrumental in drawing our attention to the general movement in the first place, insofar as they, considered together and with other details, grow into and connect up with what we eventually perceive as reverential attention to a subject. This is, indeed, the process of discovering them as style. What, then, may have struck some as a pre-emptive discussion of "style" is really one of those occasions where we feel that the normal distinction between "form" and "style" is a convenient but misleading fiction. In taking up matters of "style" in this latter and narrower sense we are merely shifting emphasis and narrowing our focus to the minute and apparently isolated movements which variously enable, reflect or, indeed, deflect the unified movement of the body as it is directed and generated by a motivating reverence.

This is another point where the connection between the style of the man of society, as Hawthorne describes it, and the exploratory movements of gentlemanly attention becomes clear. Hawthorne, as we will recall, emphasizes that his style has "none of the abstruseness of idea, or obscurity of expression, which mark the written communications of a solitary mind with itself." It is "not the talk of a secluded man with his own mind and heart" but represents, instead, his "attempts, and very imperfectly successful ones, to open an intercourse with the world." The statement calls attention to the essentially conversational nature of his style; the direct address, and the explicit regard for his audience are both the product of an effort to acknowledge the presence and pressure of other minds. It is talk, but adapted to a social situation. As a means of opening an intercourse with the world it is admirably suited, but Hawthorne shows us how suitable an instrument it is for the kind of exploratory contact with a subject he seeks.

We have already had a glimpse of how this works in his treatment of the Inspector. The parenthetical thrust ("Looking at him merely as an animal--and there was very little else to look at--") recording as it does a spontaneous adjustment of thought to subject, shows us how Hawthorne exploits the *ex tempore* movement of conversation, just as it gives us the feel of conversation. Indeed, the parenthesis is a fairly common feature of Hawthorne's prose. We find it elsewhere in the sketch of the Inspector:

> ...he seemed--not young, indeed--but a kind of new contrivance of Mother Nature in the shape of man, whom age and infirmity had no business to touch.(17)

> It might be difficult--and it was so--to conceive how he should exist hereafter, so earthy and sensuous did he seem;...(18)

Each instance shows us Hawthorne in the act of reaching out for the right assessment in the form of an unpremeditated qualifying phrase. Later, in his treatment of General Miller, we find the same thing:

> A soldier,--New England's most distinguished soldier,--he stood firmly on the pedestal of his gallant services;...(12)

And:

> Nevertheless, looking at the old warrior with affection,--for, slight as was the communication between us, my feeling towards him, like that of all bipeds and quadrupeds who knew him, might not improperly be termed so,--I could discern the main points of his portrait.(21)

The first example is straightforward enough. It simply draws out, in the form of an afterthought, that the General is not just any soldier. In the second example, Hawthorne rather abruptly interrupts the forward movement of his sentence with an extended qualification of and refinement upon the nature of his affection for the General, which is wedged between an opening participial phrase and the main clause which the phrase modifies. The sentence as a whole does have something of the movement of a periodic construction as a result of the suspension of the main clause until the end. However, the qualifying clause is of such amplitude that it defies the structural limitations and the more composed effect that a normally constructed period would impose upon it. Moreover, the clause is introduced so abruptly that one can only feel that it is an essentially unpremeditated reflection which reveals a corresponding disrespect for ready-made structures. All of these qualities reflect, indeed, the pressure of rounding out a thought in accordance with Hawthorne's immediately felt need to go on to define the quality of affection he feels for the General at the precise moment he lays claim to it.

One motive for this may well be that of polite anticipation of the objections a skeptical audience might raise; but if so, this anticipation is just as impromptu; it involves answering for an audience the same questions Hawthorne would have to settle for himself--what is, after all, the extent of my affection? Am I justified in laying claim to it? The questions we feel lurking behind the statement are not answered here, but this does not mean that Hawthorne is showing a fussy concern. We know that he is generally concerned with establishing a ground of affection as the basis of moral inquiry and that this is what he is attempting to sound out in this sentence. He is laying claim to affection as a condition for discerning "the main points" of the General's character. The affection that he does feel, as we discover in the sketch, is genuine enough; however, it is complicated and finally limited by the lack of communication he can have with the old man, because of the old man's dignified and elusive aloofness from the clatter of the Custom-House and its officers. So Hawthorne does see a problem, or, rather, feels its presence below the surface of his otherwise straightforward statement. We also see that Hawthorne disrupts the normal structure of the sentence to record the presence of this feeling, along with its occasion, without compromising the structure and coherence of the sentence.

The parenthetical interruption, then, although a relatively simple device, is well suited to the demands of a true gentleman's attention to a subject. It enhances the capacity of Hawthorne's style to represent the mind in the process of making contact with its subject as a necessary adjustment to his awareness that the intellect cannot fully encompass its subject in a single sweep and within the neater forms of concentrated generalization. This awareness reflects, then, not only a sensitivity to an epistemological problem but also a sensitivity to its ethical implications, for it commands a respectful and caring submission to what the subject is yet to reveal of itself to the mind. Accordingly, it resists the potentially distorting simplifications of more concocted and preconceived composition which may crowd out and thwart the intimate contact necessary for accuracy and truth.

Still, a gentleman's style, as Hawthorne appears to conceive it, does not resist concoction to the point that his discoveries and perceptions are so unstructured that they cannot be delivered to others in shareable form. Indeed, if a gentleman is attentive to his subject he is equally attentive to his audience. This is not a matter of mere courtesy, for his own experience of a truth, simply enough, would not be intelligible if it could not be shared, shared, that is, according to the common forms and structures of understanding which make the experience recoverable not only for his audience but for himself. There is a sense, then, in which ordered expression coexists peacefully with immediacy of perception, in which, that is, perspicuity intersects with process.

It is this particular balance of perspicuity and process which accounts for the flexible way in which Hawthorne handles rhetorical parallelism:

> No aim, that I have ever cherished, would they recognize as laudable; no success of mine--if my life, beyond its domestic scope, had ever been brightened by success--would they deem otherwise than worthless, if not positively disgraceful.(10)

In this passage, Hawthorne is reflecting on how his Puritan ancestors would have judged him in his occupation as "a writer of story-books." He allows his reflection to be patterned by the repetitive formula but at the same time disrupts the pattern; the figure is not permitted to crowd out the parenthetical qualification that grows naturally out of "no success of mine" although the parenthesis, in turn, does not so disrupt the pattern that we do not feel the presence of its rhythmic emphasis. Indeed, the suggestion of a developing pattern depends on very few repeated elements; "No aim" is picked up by "no success..." and "would they recognize" by "would they deem;" still, we have enough to suggest what form the fully developed figure would take:

> No aim, that I have ever cherished, would they recognize as laudable; no success, that I have ever achieved, would they deem as valuable.

But having developed it, we feel immediately how the resulting symmetry would destroy the comparative richness incorporated in the original. Hawthorne's alteration of the formula permits him to exploit the emphasis it normally provides in order to suggest just how complete and absolute his ancestor's dismissal of him would be but it also makes allowance for the spontaneously induced qualification of the nature of his success.

The flexibility he shows here leads us to other flexible uses he makes of oratorical forms and of how he makes use of them without breaching the conversational norm of the sketch. We see this in a passage already quoted from

Hawthorne's sketch of the General:

> What I saw in him--as evidently as the indestructible ramparts of Old Ticonderoga, already cited as the most appropriate simile--were the features of stubborn and ponderous endurance, which might well have amounted to obstinancy in his earlier days; of integrity, that, like most of his other endowments, lay in a somewhat heavy mass, and was just as unmalleable and unmanageable as a ton of iron ore; and of benevolence, which, fiercely as he led the bayonets on at Chippewa or Fort Erie, I take to be of quite as genuine a stamp as what actuates any or all the polemical philanthropists of the age.

The repeated pattern of "of" phrases is less oratorical than conversational; the units of the figure are not rigidly bound to equivalence of length, but expand and contract at will. But, although the rhythm of the phrasing is subdued, we nonetheless feel its presence and its appropriateness as a natural response to the General's features in the way it gathers in and distributes the massive materials of his character. Hawthorne's handling of the figure is, in fact, partly responsible for discovering and defining the sense of heroic presence and of the feeling proper to it that we noticed earlier. This is syntax which shapes itself around the subject and which displays a genuine tact, in the sense of being in discriminating contact with the subject.

That this flexibility of response is a general feature of Hawthorne's style is confirmed again when we note, that without any apparent modulation in manner, he can relax into a quick-paced and unconcocted movement which can sympathetically reflect and create something of the Inspector's enthusiasm for the supper table:

> I have heard him smack his lips over dinner, every guest at which, except himself, had long been food for worms. It was marvellous to observe how the ghosts of bygone meals were continually rising up before him; not in anger or in retribution, but as if grateful for his former appreciation, and seeking to reduplicate an endless series of enjoyments, at once shadowy and sensual. A tenderloin of beef, a hind-quarter of veal, a spare-rib of pork, a particular chicken, or a remarkably praise-worthy turkey, which had perhaps adorned his board in the days of the elder Adams, would be remembered; while all the subsequent experience of our race, and all the events that brightened or darkened his individual career, had gone over him with as little permanent effect as the passing breeze.(19)

The quick pace of this passage is a function, not so much of the movement from sentence to sentence as it is of the succession of relatively brief phrases and clauses that build into sentences. But the quick-paced enthusiasm is not so great as to overwhelm the fact that all the different phrasal and clausal elements are firmly tied into connected and composed units of thought. Still, the composed effect is not that of periodic encircling of a thought, but accommodates something of the forward serial motion of perception. The passage partakes of the speed and serial movement of Lamb's "Mrs. Battle's Opinion on Whist" written in the asyndetic and terse mode of contemporary Senecanism:

> She took, and gave, no concessions. She hated favours. She never made a revoke, nor ever passed it over in her adversary without exacting the utmost forfeiture. She fought a good fight: cut and thrust. She held not her good sword (her cards) 'like a dancer'. She sate bolt upright; and neither showed you her cards, nor desired to see yours.’‘

’‘Charles Lamb, "Mrs. Battle's Opinions on Whist," in his *Elia* (London: Taylor and Hessey, 1823), p. 74.

but without the accompanying and studied blur of activity that comes with the lack of connection in Lamb's style.

However, brevity and pointedness are features that Hawthorne can nevertheless accommodate within the context of his characteristic conversational amplitude. We feel that Hawthorne carefully isolates those moments where it is fully appropriate. Referring to the old Inspector's sinecure, Hawthorne observes:

> The father of the Custom-House--the patriarch, not only of this little squad of officials, but, I am bold to say, of the respectable body of tide-waiters all over the United States--was a certain permanent Inspector. He might truly be termed a legitimate son of the revenue system, dyed in the wool, or rather, born in the purple;...(16)

The gracefully and spontaneously extended parenthesis is met with and set off against the epigrammatic definitiveness of "dyed in the wool, or rather born in the purple." Or, in the same vein, referring to the Inspector's voice and laugh: "They come strutting out of his lungs, like the crow of a cock, or the blast of the clarion." There is the appropriate spontaneity of the turn of wit in

> I doubt greatly--or rather, I do not doubt at all--whether any public functionary in the United States, either in the civil or military line, has ever had such a patriarchal body of veterans under his orders as myself.(12)

Or, finally, there is the sense of the unmistakably plain truth transmitted by pointed summary in

> This long connection of a family with one spot, as its place of birth and burial, creates a kindred between the human being and the locality, quite independent of any charm in the scenery or moral circumstances that surround him. It is not love, but instinct.(11)

Our sense that brevity has its appropriate moments is intensified, however, by Hawthorne's discrimination of other occasions where it is not appropriate as we see in the case of the General, who like the Inspector, is, in his own way, a rare phenomenon and requires a syntax which submits to and becomes an instrument of exploratory meditation:

> There he used to sit, gazing with a somewhat dim serenity of aspect at the figures that came and went; amid the rustle of papers, the administering of oaths, the discussion of business, and the casual talk of the office; all which sounds and circumstances seemed but indistinctly to impress his senses, and hardly make their way into his inner sphere of contemplation.(20)

The particular movement of this sentence is quite interesting and deserves some extended discussion. First, to break it down into its parts: the sentence consists of an opening main clause, followed by a modifying participal phrase, and, then, an adverbial phrase which reaches back to the main verb, followed by a clause which develops the adverbial phrase. The body of the sentence consists primarily of an amplification of the different elements of the main clause, so that we are concerned primarily with the manner of the old man's sitting. He is, while sitting, gazing with a "somewhat dim serenity at the figures as they came and went." We move to the adverbial phrase which picks up on the activities associated with this coming and going and which develops them into "the rustle of papers, the administering of oaths, the discussion of business and the casual talk of the office," referring them all back to the main verb. There is a final extension of the adverbial phrase signalled by "all of which" which takes the form of a clause, but which is not attached, by way of subordination, to the main clause. Rather, it is an outgrowth of the adverbial phrase. It gathers in all of these details ("all of which sounds and circumstances") and presses forward to note how little of an impression they make on the General. They seemed "but indistinctly to impress his senses, and hardly make their way into his inner sphere of comprehension."

Interestingly enough, this latter notation, although it is connected to the adverbial phrase, and thus, ultimately, connected to the verb of the main clause, is associatively linked to the "dim serenity of aspect" which is brought out in the participal phrase. The final clause is, thus, an unpremeditated but, at the same time, an appropriate rounding out of an earlier and more general impression of the General's state of mind. It also asserts a connection between this more specific impression of the General's state of mind and a more specific rendering of the comings and goings of figures in the Custom-House; or, rather, it uncovers a connection. The clause is, in fact, the final stage of a process of moving from more general impressions--"dim serenity" and "figures that came and went"--to a more specific and accurate impression of the same phenomenon. So, we now perceive that the General's dim serenity of aspect in the face of the general hubbub of the Custom-House is more a matter of these specifically rendered sounds and circumstances not making their way into the old man's "inner sphere of contemplation," a development which qualifies and sharpens "dim serenity" into an attitude that suggests something of a less neutral aloofness. The order of the sentence, then, reflects something of the mind in the process of sharpening its focus on a subject by means of an associative progression from and revision of a general impression to a more specific one. At the same time, coherence is maintained by the syntax, which, although it follows the order of impressions, ties the subsequent impressions to the main clause, however loosely, thus containing an associatively generated image of the old man sitting in his chair.

This is a long discussion of not very imposing or complex matter, but it is justified to the extent that it reveals and reaffirms something about Hawthorne's method of inquiry on the level of style. Furthermore, as we saw in the discussion of the Inspector, we confront the difficulty of separating the discussion of the movement shown in what we usually recognize as the province of style from the way Hawthorne moves in his treatment of the General as a whole.

For the impression that Hawthorne develops within the sentence is developed according to the same method of accumulation and accretion of observation and reflection throughout the rest of the character sketch. By the time we reach the end of the sketch we have a much more sharply defined image of the General, which represents a rounding out of the implications suggested in the original and more superficial image. Dim serenity is evolved into a richer sense of the General's alienation from the clatter of the office and of its causes. This is why it is hard to discuss the sentence without moving further afield from it, without sensing its interconnections with the rest of the sketch and with other portions of the Custom-House sketch as a whole, which among other things gives support and resonance to the sounds and circumstances from which the General is so distant. Again, it is a problem of isolating, for close attention, minute and delicate movements which go into defining and, yet, which take their character and direction from the movement of the whole body.

The whole movement of Hawthorne's prose, as we have seen so far, is controlled and directed by the care and attention of the gentleman and the movement itself--the body of this controlling intelligence--is his conversation. And his conversation shows the readiness and ability of the gentleman to shape his style around the demands of his subject, a sensitivity which is perhaps most apparent in his syntax. Sentences expand and contract, their structures tighten and relax, as the occasion requires and as the discriminations of a mind given over to "the light of observation" and the "tact of sympathy" isolates these occasions. These flexes of syntax all reflect a certain spontaneity in the interest of scrupulousness of perception and feeling, an extemporaneity which reflects a capacity for an exploratory and wondering contact with a subject and a sense of arrived-at exactness. And, one should add, at no expense to the perspicuity of a gentleman's conversation, for while it resists more structured and mannered forms of expression, it nevertheless takes advantage of their expressive and ordering capabilities without compromising the conversational style.

There are, however, significant features of Hawthorne's style in "The Custom-House" sketch which are inconsistent with the heuristic and tactful contact he is generally able to maintain. Our attention is called to this inconsistency through what was noticed earlier as the "ceremonious" care he shows in his treatment of the customs officers as a group: "It would be a sad injustice, the reader must understand. . . . But. . .there will be no wrong done. . . ." This explicit submission to his subject and to his audience is congruent with the modesty of the gentlemanly explorer of moral character, except, significantly enough, for the very explicitness of the statement itself. It reflects, to his credit, the studied effort not to be dictatorial, but has, nevertheless, the feel of making an issue of how much care he is showing for fairness and judiciousness. If we note the frequency with which Hawthorne makes such statements, we have a more solid basis for this feeling. Indeed, Hawthorne's prose is full of such interjections as "so far as I could judge," "I am bold to say," "If I recollect aright," "I should imagine," "the author is constrained," and so on. The cumulative effect of these gestures is to suggest a certain servility, but if this is too strong a statement, we feel that Hawthorne is, at least, treading a thin line between genuine submission--the kind that he otherwise consistently achieves in "The Custom-House"--and *obtruding* his submission. There is a note of *over*-respect which is a reflex of the inability to achieve a familiar and intimate contact with one's subject.

These details are slight enough that one might be able to dismiss them as accidental deflections from what has emerged as the general aims of Hawthorne's style. But there is more. Inasmuch as this over-respect is a kind of sentimentality, a response in excess of the facts of one's experience--or, more accurately, an essentially uninvolved and insincere response--it leads the reader to other similar lapses:

> A trait of native elegance, seldom seen in the masculine character after childhood or early youth, was shown in the General's fondness for the sight and fragrance of flowers. An old soldier might be supposed to prize only the bloody laurel on his brow; but here was one, who seemed to have a young girl's appreciation of the floral tribe.(22-23)

The General affects this sensitivity just as Hawthorne approves of it. But it is a clear example of purely conventional feeling. Hawthorne is speaking of the Man of Feeling, as one, indeed, of a large community who found *Evangeline* genuinely moving. What distinguishes such a point of view is its lack of perceptual and sympathetic contact with a subject, a lack of contact which is both a self-satisfied standing-off and a failure to achieve an involved submission to one's matter, a failure, ultimately, of the imagination. The neat and cloying antithesis of the stock figures of the "bloody laurel" and "floral tribe" and of the old warrior and the young girl is our clue to this unmeasured sense of being moved overmuch, and, hence, like the problem of over-respect, signals an accompanying sense of shivering isolation. One thinks, in this connection, of Mel Brooks's occasional ability to hit the nail on the head when he portrays Hitler reproving Eva Braun for swatting a fly at the dinner table in Berchtesgaden: "Don't you think a fly has a family too?" The difference is of degree, but only of degree. Over-respect and being overly moved, as we see in Hawthorne's description of the General, fit nicely together:

> An old soldier *might be supposed* to prize only *the bloody laurel* on his brow; but here was one, who *seemed to have* a young girl's appreciation of *the floral tribe*.

They both share the sentimental impulse, which is the opposite of sympathetic submission, whether it is in the form of excessive submission or--and this is entirely consistent--of an equally excessive and correspondingly cool and distancing self-assertion. First there is the claim that "it contributes greatly towards a man's moral and intellectual health, to be brought into habits of companionship with individuals unlike himself, and whose sphere and abilities he must go out of himself to appreciate."(24) His experience he conceives as a therapeutic experiment, a test of his integrity which is somehow confused with a sense of utter independence:

> Such were some of the people with whom I found myself connected. I took it in good part at the hand of Providence, that I was thrown into a position so little akin to my past habits; and set myself seriously to gather from it whatever profit was to be had. After my fellowship of toil and impracticable schemes, with the dreamy brethren of Brook Farm; after living for three years within the subtle influence of an intellect like Emerson's; after those, wild, free days on the Assabeth, indulging fantastic speculations beside our fire of fallen boughs, with Ellery Channing; after talking with Thoreau about pine-trees and Indian relics, in his hermitage at Walden; after growing fastidious by sympathy with the classic refinement of Hillard's culture; after becoming imbued with poetic sentiment at Longfellow's hearth-stone;--it was time, at length, that I should exercise other faculties of my nature, and nourish myself with food for which I had hitherto had little appetite. Even the old Inspector was desirable as a change of diet, to a man who had known Alcott. I looked upon it as evidence, in some measure, of a system naturally well balanced, and lacking no essential part of a thorough organization, that, with such associates to remember, I could mingle at once with men of altogether different qualities, and never murmur at the change.(25)

"And never murmur at the change!" His circumstances may well force this upon him, for he is at home neither in the world of "fantastic speculation" nor its opposite and, it would seem, single alternative, the mere sensuality of the Inspector. But Hawthorne reacts with a gentlemanly adaptability which is taken to an isolating extreme and justified by a self-assertive boast.

Curiously, the charge of sentimentality is a judgement we can make on the basis of Hawthorne's style in the "Custom-House" and of the standard of gentlemanly attention it embodies. But this is a criticism Hawthorne himself can never effectively make, for everywhere there is evidence of the false poeticism he is prone to:

> It impressed me as if the ancient Surveyor, in his garb of a hundred years gone by, and wearing his immortal wig,--which was buried with him, but did not perish in the grave,--had met me in the deserted chamber of the Custom-House. In his port was the dignity of one who had borne his Majesty's commission, and who was therefore illuminated by a ray of the splendor that shone so dazzlingly about the throne.(33)

Or, the falsely poetic and inauthentic expression of awe, when he discovers the scarlet letter in the attic:

> It had been intended, there could be no doubt, as an ornamental article of dress; but how it was to be worn, or what rank, honor, and dignity, in by-past times, were signified by it, was a riddle which (so evanescent are the fashions of the world in these particulars) I saw little hope of solving. And yet it strangely interested me. My eyes fastened themselves upon the scarlet letter, and would not be turned aside. Certainly, there was some deep meaning in it, most worthy of interpretation, and which, as it were, streamed forth from the mystic symbol, subtly communicating itself to my sensibilities, but evading the analysis of my mind.(31)

It is, curiously enough, difficult to tell whether or not this statement is ironically intended. At any rate, it is fussy ("there could be no doubt," "so evanescent are the fashions of the world", "Certainly, there was some deep meaning in it," "as it were") and condescending--he finds the mysterious relic "most worthy of interpretation" which has the condescending note of "ah, how *very* intriguing." There is, on the whole, a disturbing lack of reticence which would be the natural response of one who is genuinely struck with awe; the chattiness here strikes one as the reaction of a man who cannot gracefully submit to a failure to penetrate the significance of a mystery. If there is submission, it is the grudging kind of someone who takes inordinate pleasure in being untouched and in command.

Thus, any attempt to characterize the movement of Hawthorne's prose must take into account the sentimental alienation which exists alongside the perspicuity and sympathetic involvement ~~that we have~~ already noticed of the style of the man of society. It is also a particularly persistent coexistence--a coexistence of impulses which flatly contradict each other and which is a persistent feature of Hawthorne's style that carries over into *The Scarlet Letter*. But I do not wish to begin a discussion of *The Scarlet Letter* itself without first attempting to suggest why this contradiction between a sympathetic and heuristic involvement with and a contrary alienation from a subject is somehow a radical and habitual feature of Hawthorne's gentlemanly attention and not merely a failure in execution.

IV. The Hawthorne "Problem"

If we are to do justice to the character of Hawthorne's style, we must confront the Hawthorne "problem." It is a problem which anyone who has studied Hawthorne's life and work with care has run into and is usually felt among different readers as a peculiar combination of genius and limitation. We can characterize this problem now in a very specific way in the light of what we have discovered about "The Custom-House" sketch. We do feel, I think, that the "Custom-House" both illuminates and confirms the sense in which Hawthorne could be a "gentleman in the best sense of the word." But, at the same time, we are forced to ask the question: how could a man who is recognizably a true gentleman be so ungentlemanly--and in such a radically uncritical way? That is, how could a man who was so intensely aware of the reverent aims of the gentleman be so susceptible to a contradictory sentimentality?

Answering these questions depends, in part, upon noting the sheer depth and extent of this problem. We may return to Julian Hawthorne again, for within an awkwardly proximate distance to his remarks concerning the reverential quality of his father's mind, he nevertheless makes note of an irreverent undercurrent. First, he says:

> Now Hawthorne, both by nature and by training, was of a disposition to throw himself imaginatively into the shoes (as the phrase is) of whatever person happened to be his companion. For the time being, he would seem to take their point of view and to speak their language; it was the result partly of a subtle sympathy and partly of a cold intellectual insight,

> which led him half consciously to reflect what he so clearly perceived. Thus, if he chatted with a group of rude sea-captains in the smoking-room of Mrs. Blodgett's boarding-house, or joined a knot of boon companions in a Boston bar-room, or talked metaphysics with Herman Melville on the hills of Berkshire, he would aim to appear in each instance a man like as they were; he would have the air of being interested in their interests and viewing life by their standards.[57]

However, as Julian goes on to point out, this appearance of solidarity and congeniality is just that:

> ...the real man stood aloof and observant, and only showed himself as he was, in case his prerogatives being invaded, or his actual liberty of thought and action being in any way infringed upon.

Consequently others would generally not detect his "absolute attitude"--that, even though he would appear to assure others that he was "no more and no less than one of themselves," they were, in fact, "but a tiny arc in the great circle of his comprehension." Of this, Julian appropriately notes that

> there is a cold touch in it; it has a look of amusing one's self at others' expense or profiting by their follies. The drunkard who complains that his companion allows him to get drunk, but empties his glass over his shoulder, generally finds some sympathy for his complaint. Literally, as well as figuratively, it might have been said that Hawthorne should 'drink square,' or keep out of the way.[58]

I should point out that the context of these remarks is that of Julian's attempt to rescue Hawthorne from this characterization, even as he gives it such vivid plausibility. He goes on to say in the next sentence: "There is nothing, however, to prevent the most contracted mind from perceiving that to be a student of human nature is not the same as to be a spy upon it."[59] But it is fair to say that the plausibility of the description almost completely overwhelms the attempt to undermine it. There is simply too much to suggest that Hawthorne was indeed a kind of spy or, if a "student," it is in a sense so obviously limited to spying.

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[57] Julian Hawthorne, I, 88-89.
[58] Julian Hawthorne, I, 89.

Thus, Julian leaves us with the impression of a man who habitually asserts an independence from others which is sometimes consistent with a confident sense of superiority. It is the mark of one who is unimplicated in the actions and circumstances of those around him and who is, in essence, a social performer, whose involvement with others is limited purely to ingratiation, an involvement which is essentially sentimental and insincere; that is, he lays claim to emotions which he cannot participate in. If, then, he has the capacity for "subtle sympathy" and "intellectual insight," they are not conjoined in a reverent synthesis. Rather, it is the sort of sympathy required of an accomplished actor and an intellectual insight divorced from sympathetic involvement with others. However, although he appears as the sometimes coldly detached critic or, on other occasions, as an idly curious observer--which is consistent with this detachment--this does not suggest wilful deception so much as it suggests to us a man whose intellectual and emotional constitution is radically uncentered and divided. He is a victim of a dissociation of judgement and feeling, to the impoverishment of both, an impoverishment which, moreover, has drastic implications for his art.

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[59] Julian Hawthorne, I, 89.

Hyatt Waggoner, more recently, has called attention to this sentimental strain in Hawthorne's character but draws rather different conclusions which, however much authority they might carry, are nonetheless perplexing. Waggoner's most interesting observations appear in the first chapter of *Hawthorne: A Critical Study* in which he discusses the "paradoxical" character of Hawthorne's intelligence. For we find that Hawthorne is, on the one hand, the "the man of sensibility"--a man who, as noted before, was deeply moved by *Evangeline*. On the other, he could be, as Waggoner points out, "cold, isolated, watchful, skeptical." He exhibits "the sense of irony, the cool skepticism, the detached sometimes cruel sense of humor" that, along with his notable excesses of sensibility, reflect his self-confessed difficulty "to feel as he knew he *ought* to feel. Often he found it difficult to feel at all, even to feel the wrong emotions."[60]

Waggoner, it should be added, bases these observations, for the most part, on evidence provided by letters and notebook entries and he is prepared to grant that "Hawthorne must have been to some degree, in short, the man he saw himself as being." However, Waggoner raises this issue in order to dismiss it as irrelevant to an true judgement of Hawthorne's writing. Actually, Waggoner wishes to confine these different strains of Hawthorne's sentimentality to a taxonomy of the different masks Hawthorne wore in his public life, to a discussion of Hawthorne as a bundle of conflicts and divisions that really do not concern the literary critic. Waggoner's position, in fact, is that there are no relevant literary consequences beyond Hawthorne's efforts to portray certain traits of character that he noticed and disliked in himself. Waggoner, accordingly, emphasizes how painfully conscious Hawthorne was of these traits inasmuch as he sought to portray these traits in his fiction. He notes with some degree of accuracy, for example, how Hawthorne projects himself into Miles Coverdale in *The Blithedale Romance*, Ethan Brand, the young man in "The Christmas Banquet" and so on. But if we wish to discover the source of these conflicts and divisions, we can only do so "by a leap of intuitive sympathy,"--for what little good this would do. For Waggoner states that even if one "has made the leap successfully," there is "no publicly demonstrable test of success." Thus, if we are to understand Hawthorne's art, we must take heed that "no merely factual knowledge of the externals of Hawthorne's life will be of much use." We must consider, rather, that Hawthorne's "creative life was wholly inward" and "that which is most valuable in Hawthorne's writings springs from the depths of head and heart where newspaper headlines make no ripple."[61]

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[60] Hyatt Waggoner, *Hawthorne: A Critical Study*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1967), pp. 2-3.

There is some truth to what Waggoner says here, which is why he is rather misleading. When Waggoner tries to dismiss the relevance of "merely factual knowledge of externals," he may be doing us a service, if what he means by merely "merely factual knowledge" is something like the apprehension of mere unconnected and unrelated details. The nature of the service he performs is thus stating the obvious--we should not be distracted by useless facts. But clearly he wishes to include among the "merely factual" those interpretations we might offer of the character of Hawthorne's mind, based as they must be on what we can observe of externals. Some interpretations will be more or less accurate than others, but if we are making observations on how Hawthorne's mind is constituted, upon the examination of the various particulars of his life (as Waggoner himself has done), we must face the simple fact that it is the same man, the same mind, the same head and heart which creates works of literature. Works of art are as external as anything else and are products of a mind which, however constituted, is only present to us as external fact. Thus, it is not at all obvious how the distortions that Waggoner calls to our attention could be anything other than a reflection of Hawthorne's head and heart. And it is not an issue that can be disposed of by regarding the creative life as somehow a mysterious and utterly separate category of the mind which is untouched by the circumstances of one's private life and one's culture. Waggoner, at the very least, owes us an explanation as to what this "spot where newspaper headlines make no ripple" is and how one gets there.

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[61] Waggoner, p. 7.

On the other hand, we don't have to look very hard to see the plausibility of this dissociation and of the possibility that, whatever its sources, and however conscious Hawthorne was of it, it could deeply compromise his art. What is true of "The Custom-House" is true of a wide range of his works. If we are looking for that sense of irony, that detached, sometimes cruel sense of humor and for evidence that, in fact, it was difficult for him to feel as he sometimes knew he ought to, there is no better example than his treatment of Jaffrey Pyncheon's death in *The House of the Seven Gables*. And he was the author of "The Haunted Mind," "Alice Doane's Appeal," "Sights from a Steeple," and numerous other sketches, in which he is guilty of the worst excesses of sensibility.

In fact, everywhere one looks in Hawthorne's works one is struck by Hawthorne's disposition to judge, but too often it is judgement unqualified by feeling and a sense of sympathetic involvement; and where there is feeling, it is too often undirected by judgement. The disruption of the reverent balance which is evident in these works, considered along with the fact that these works had an approving audience and that Hawthorne's era could be suitably described as the Age of *Evangeline*, forces one to consider the possibility that we are dealing with a predicament not peculiar to Hawthorne. It is, rather, an intellectual, emotional and, following from this, a psychological predicament which is historical and massively cultural. In claiming this, I am aware that I may be guilty of a "leap of intuitive sympathy"--this, after all, is the nature of inference and interpretation, and my argument depends on others who took the first leap--but if it is truly sympathetic, it will be publicly demonstrable.

At this point it is necessary to relate this problem to the gentlemanly style itself, for if we consider its intellectual origins a little more closely and the basis of its appeal in America, we move a little closer towards an understanding of Hawthorne's difficulty. One must keep in mind that, although we can distinguish the styles of different individuals, there is an important sense in which a style is communal property and which, moreover, defines and limits what *can* be thought and felt generally. As Ian Robinson points out:

> It is not always fully realized how the development and imitation of a style commits a writer and makes a world. Our world is limited by our styles of making sense, as well as created by them. The individual is the rhythm of his styles. There is a necessary and useful paradox: we make sense individually or not [illegible] all; on the other hand the styles in which we make sense are not the creation of any individual. The great common styles are those to which there is a common commitment.[42]

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[42] Ian Robinson, "Prose and the Dissociation of Sensibility," in *The New Pelican Guide to English Literature*, III, gen. ed. Boris Ford (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), p. 269.

It remains to be seen, then, how Hawthorne's commitment to the style of the man of society defines and, in some sense, limits the sense that he can make of the world.

If we go back to the passage from *The Spectator*, we can make a start towards illuminating how the gentlemanly style could contribute to the sentimental alienation we have noticed in Hawthorne's style. Here is the passage as it appeared in Chapter I:

> It would be a noble Improvement, or rather a Recovery of what we call good Breeding, if nothing were to pass amongst us for agreeable which was the least Transgression against that Rule of Life called Decorum, or a Regard to Decency. This would command the Respect of Mankind, because it carries in it Deference to their good Opinion; as Humility lodged in a worthy Mind is always attended with a certain Homage, which no haughty Soul, with all the Arts imaginable, will ever be able to purchase. *Tully* says Virtue and Decency are so nearly related, that it is difficult to separate them from each other but in our Imagination. As the Beauty of the Body always accompanies the Health of it, so certainly is Decency Concomitant to Virtue; as the Beauty of Body, with an agreeable Carriage, pleases the Eye, and that Pleasure consists in that we observe all the Parts with a certain Elegance are proportioned to each other; so does Decency of Behaviour which appears in our Lives obtain the Approbation of all with whom we converse, from the Order, Constancy, and Moderation of our Words and Actions. This flows from the Reverence we bear towards every good Man, and to the World in general;...

One must say, with fairness, that this passage is distinguished for its optimistic reasonableness, for an air ~~of~~ omnicompetence along with an idiomatic and intelligible didacticism, but also for a genial and polite saneness that approaches, in the same proportion, triteness. We cannot feel in the style any sense of a front against or accommodation with the emotional forces that would severely test or deflect or threaten to obliterate the reverence we would extend to the world in general. Indeed, what we notice about the style is not only its coherent neatness, itself the cumulative effect of such patterning devices as the neatly symmetrical use of analogy ("As the beauty of the body . . .; so does Decency of Behaviour . . . ."), the double predicate (. . . the Reverence we bear towards every good man, and to the World in general.") and of the overall ordered and balanced expository progression; we also notice that there is no sense of passionate engagement which would disturb this neatness and balance.[13] "Reverence" here does not, indeed, cannot resonate the way it does in the *The Scarlet Letter*, at the climactic moment of the tale, in which Hawthorne *is* fully aware of the tragic implications of the conflict of love and fear.

One could object that this is an unfair criticism to make of a passage which pretends to do nothing more than to lay down rules of behaviour for the ill-mannered and in which there are no pretensions to profundity. But this absence of engagement is perhaps even more noticeable in what must stand as an example of how the eighteenth-century understood religious consolation:

> Man, considered in himself, is a very helpless and a very wretched Being. He is subject at every Moment

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[13] See Jan Lannering, *Studies in the Prose Style of Joseph Addison*, The English Institute of the University of Uppsala. Studies on English Language and Literature, No. 9 (Uppsala, 1951; rpt. Nendeln, Liechtenstein: Kraus, 1973) p. 106.

> to the greatest Calamities and Misfortunes. He is beset with Dangers on all sides, and may become unhappy by numberless Casualties, which he could not foresee, nor have prevented, had he foreseen them.
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> It is our Comfort, while we are obnoxious to so many Accidents, that we are under the Care of one who directs Contingencies, and has in his Hands the Management of every Thing that is capable of annoying or offending us; who knows the Assistance we stand in need of, and is always ready to bestow it on those who ask it of him.
>
> The natural Homage, which such a Creature bears to so Infinitely Wise and Good a Being, is a firm Reliance on him for the Blessings and Conveniences of Life, and an habitual Trust in him for Deliverance out of all such Dangers and Difficulties as may befall us.[44]

We note the same genial omnicompetence in this passage as in the first--as we, indeed, notice throughout the *Spectator*, regardless of the subject. There is never any sense of modulation or adjustment--except for adjustments involving different degrees of the ironic and satirical--as we move between a discussion of religion and, say, an account of the sights and sounds of London on a day's journey. The genial omnicompetence here issues in rather genial praise of the Infinitely Wise Being. And, as before, it crowds out any trace of intellectual and emotional pressure that would disturb the unobtrusively patterned structures which give it definition--the smooth and tight combinations of parallelism and rhetorical balance which are pervasive features of the style of Addison and Steele.

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[44] Bond, ed., No. 441 (26 July, 1712), IV, 49. In the same essay, Addison presents us with his version of Psalm XXIII: "Tho' in the Paths of Death I tread,/ With gloomy Horrors over-spread;/ My steadfast Heart shall fear no Ill,/ For though, O Lord, art with me still; Thy friendly Crook shall give me Aid,/ And guide me through the dreadful Shade."(51)

But the sentimental alienation here, as already suggested, is not the peculiarity of particular writers, nor will it do to account for it in terms of anything so crude as the insensitivity of particular class interests, for neither explanation could account for the fact that Addison and Steele had a pervasive cultural authority. Matthew Arnold notes with some surprise that Addison, a man who reduced great ideas to "trite and barren" commonplaces, could, nevertheless, be "a man whom a nation puts forward as one of its great moralists."[65] Also involved is the medium itself--the great common style that grew out of late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, which the *Spectator*, along with Dryden and the scholars and scientists of the Restoration were instrumental in developing and which we call modern prose. More to the point, the restrictiveness we find in the prose of the *Spectator* is symptomatic of an intellectual predicament facing the English-speaking world, beginning with Descartes and the scientific revolution and culminating in the Restoration and Augustan periods, in which we find, as Ian Robinson describes it, "a determinedly untragic age."

~~What f~~ollows is a brief, if simple, sketch of the history and nature of this predicament and of the effect it had on English prose style.[66] What we get beginning in the late seventeenth century is a surrender to the efficacy of novel and extremely restrictive forms of reason among scientists, philosophers, theologians, and wits. Its somewhat ambiguous virtue was its marvelous capacity to simplify intellectual problems by appealing to "the evidence of the senses, or to a clear and distinct deduction from these."[67] On the one hand, it transformed natural philosophy into physics; but, on the other, of course, it gave authority to the optimistic view that all human problems could be *dealt with*, that religion and ethics could be, if not encompassed, then clarified by the methods of scientific inquiry and brought into line with what counts as scientific knowledge. This was, after all, the era of moral Newtonianism, the laws of Association, and rational religion.

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[65] Matthew Arnold, "The Literary Influence of the Academies," in his *Essays in Criticism: First Series*. ed. Sister Thomas Marion Hoctor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 44.

[66] Much of this summary depends upon Ian Robinson's account. See Robinson, p. 106.

A very significant consequence of this new "reasonability" was the vigorous, even passionate attempt to *purify* thought--the standard is mathematical purity--of all subjective states of feeling, for the subjective was not only conceived to be irrelevant, but also an obstacle to the enterprise of understanding oneself and the world. Feeling, as such, was stigmatized as the idiosyncratic and dangerous, if unchecked, expressions of the isolated and depraved ego. This extreme position is due, no doubt in part, to a salutary reaction to the religious and imaginative excesses of the previous era. But the claims of reasonability undermined the very basis of religious feeling in response; original sin could be viewed as inconsistent with a God, whom Shaftesbury could describe as "the best natured being in the world." Sin, so far as it could be said to exist, was merely *errata* or the product of ignorance aggravated by the deceptions of priestcraft.

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[67] Joseph Glanvill, *The Vanity of Dogmatizing* (New York: Facsimile Text Society, 1931), p. 91, as quoted in George Williamson, *Seventeenth-Century Contexts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 224.

The whole emphasis of this campaign, then, is overwhelmingly to control and to suppress private feeling. This is the context of Steele's insistence on "order, constancy and moderation" as cardinal virtues. The reasonable man is eminently a sociable man. Moreover, he is conceived as the ideal of the *whole* man. And, inasmuch as such a conception gained wide currency, the moral and sociological consequences would be drastic. In this connection, one thinks naturally of the ludicrous isolation of Herman Melville's bachelor-clubmen in "The Paradise of Bachelors" as they convivially talk and pass the port:

> The thing called pain, the bugbear styled trouble--those two legends seemed preposterous to their bachelor imaginations. How could men of liberal sense, ripe scholarship in the world, and capacious philosophical and convivial understandings--how could they suffer themselves to be imposed upon by such monkish fables? Pain! Trouble! As well talk of Catholic miracles. No such thing.--Pass the sherry, sir.--Pooh, pooh! Can't be!--~~The~~ port, sir, if you please. Nonsense; don't tell me so.--The decanter stops with you, sir, I believe.['']

[''] Herman Melville, "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids," in *Great Short Works of Herman Melville*, ed. Warner Berthoff (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), p.209. p. 209.

The *reductio ad absurdum* of this trend is found, as Robinson points out, in Jonathan Swift's non-human because purely rational Houyhnhnms fending off (and rationally weighing arguments for and against exterminating) the barely human and comically revolting Yahoos. It is significant that an eighteenth-century perception of the problem could be rendered only in the form of a satire. Swift would be capable of perceiving the extreme case but would not be able to imagine a positive image of his standard of judgement.''

The literary consequences of this movement include a tendency to distinguish the functions of prose and poetry, consigning to the former the communication of knowledge and, to the latter, the intoxicated expression of feeling. It is true that the foundation of this distinction goes as far back as Plato's attack on rhetoric and finds support from Bacon and Ramus, but by the time of the Restoration, it has taken root and has become a difficult assumption to challenge. It yields a prose which accordingly stresses logic, clarity and didacticism and takes the form of "naked propositions" and "mathematical plainness." But lost in this conception, is, of course, the notion of thought and language as essentially heuristic, the sense that true understanding depends on the reverentially impersonal contact with experience that is implied in Melville's notion of seeking and not finding yet. Melville's bachelors have

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''Even if we must make an exception of Pedro de Mendoza, in Book IV of *Gulliver's Travels*, it seems clear, at least, that, for Swift, such a standard could not be embodied in the form of an Englishman.

been cut off from their tragic nature partly because they, and their contemporaries, have lost the forms with which to explore it. Thus, we have a prose which is wonderfully suited to joining in the world but which has built into it a view of the everyday world, the world of the already known, in which the individual basis of perception virtually collapses into a corporate and normative attitude. Small wonder then that the eighteenth century would mistake, as Matthew Arnold pointed out, unfelt commonplaces for wisdom.

Nineteenth-century America is no less involved in this dissociation of sensibility for, in fact, it has particularly fertile soil in the conditions of American intellectual and social life. The native sources of this dissociation are to found in the history of Puritan New England, as H.B. Parkes and Yvor Winters have suggested, particularly in the historical development of Calvinist theology.[18] This calls attention to the fact that there is an intimate association between Protestantism and fragmentation in England, but the differences in America are those of intensity. The Calvinist rejection of the Aristotelian-Catholic analysis of human action--specifically the doctrine of the cooperation of nature and grace, but, at the same time, a subtle and sensitive analysis of the interconnections of the public and private life--has profound consequences.[71] Perhaps the most important consequence is that it set loose irreconcilable conceptions of the public and private. On the one hand, an intense individualism collided with, on the other hand, the corrective of an abstract, cerebral and facilely optimistic reduction of religion into mere social morality, the "genteel tradition" that, as George Santayana puts it, "forbids people to confess they are unhappy."[72] Transcendentalism emerges out of this conflict as a corrective to the social moralism of the Unitarians. One might even say that it is an attempt at a synthesis of the two traditions. But it succeeds only in preserving the mysticism of the Puritans and the naive optimism of the Unitarians and, moreover, magnifies the opposition between the public and private into the One and the Many.

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[18] H.B. Parkes, *The Pragmatic Test: Essays on the History of Ideas* (San Francisco: The Colt Press, 1941), pp. 10-38. Yvor Winters, *In Defense of Reason*, (Denver: Swallow, 1947), pp. 157-176.

This particularly extreme form of the dissociation of judgement and feeling, as Yvor Winters has pointed out,--for this is essentially his argument, although he does not use the term "dissociation"--proves to be an enormous obstacle to the writing of great literature. Hawthorne, in particular, was faced with

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[71] See Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1939), pp. 49-63. The relationship between Calvinism and Catholicism, for Miller, is more complicated but he does confirm the point that Calvinism tends to degrade into social moralism. See also "From Edwards to Emerson," *New England Quarterly*, 13 (1940), 589-617.

[72] George Santayana, "The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy," in *Selected Critical Writings of George Santayana*, ed. Norman Henfrey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), p. 96.

> the choice between abstractions inadequate or irrelevant to experience on the one hand, and experience on the other as far as practicable unilluminated by understanding;...only a few scattered individuals, at the cost of inordinate labor, and often impermanently, have achieved the permeation of human experience by a consistent moral understanding which results in wisdom and in great art.[13]

According to Winters, this predicament is reflected, on the one hand, by Hawthorne's reliance upon allegory and, on the other, by his unsuccessful attempts to break out of its simplifying constraints in an effort to achieve the method of the novelist. Allegory, as Winters suggests, is Hawthorne's inheritance of Puritan habits of thought--although it is interesting to note that it is a literary method dear to the eighteenth century. Its popularity is due to the fact that it conforms readily to the eighteenth-century disposition to regard literature, at best, as a didactic instrument which gives thought a pleasing dress for the benefit of the dull and the uneducated. And there is a great deal of evidence to suggest that the dream allegories in, for example, the *Spectator* were just as formative for Hawthorne.[14] Nevertheless, although Winters is right in detecting a certain restrictiveness in Hawthorne's work, he is wrong to suggest that Hawthorne did not have the mind of a novelist and that this mind is not at work in *The Scarlet Letter*.

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[13] Yvor Winters, *In Defense of Reason* (Denver: Swallow, 1947), pp. 174-175.

[14] Mark Evan Johnston, "The Receding Narrator: the *Spectator*, the *Rambler* and Hawthorne's Shorter Fiction," *Essays in Arts and Sciences*, 6 (1977), 20-46.

This returns us to the fact that, in spite of his susceptibility to sentimentality, Hawthorne was critically aware of the reverent aims of the gentlemanly intelligence, just as he was aware of the kind of adjustment of style this would involve. "The Custom-House" does reveal to us that he achieves the flexible and heuristic forms which could bring the mind back into contact with experience. As to how he could have such a critical awareness in such an intellectual environment raises other historical issues which are beyond the scope of this study. But the considerable odds against the consistent maintenance of such an awareness have a measurably destructive effect on Hawthorne's achievement in *The Scarlet Letter*.

V. *The Scarlet Letter*

Q.D. Leavis, in her pioneering essay on Nathaniel Hawthorne, provides us with perhaps the most concentrated and accurate judgement of Hawthorne's abilities as a writer. We recognize in him, she observes, the same virtue that permits us to link him with Shakespeare, Henry James, and Tolstoy (the Tolstoy of *Anna Karenina*), which she describes as

> that 'remarkable balance and detachment' which is indispensible to the greatest achievement of literary art. Like these artists Hawthorne in his best work is offering in dramatic form an analysis of a complex situation in which he sides with no one party but is imaginatively present in each, having created each to represent a facet of the total experience he is concerned to communicate.[78]

Here, clearly, Mrs. Leavis identifies the mark of a reverent intellect. For "balance and detachment", in the sense in which she wishes to define it, entails a sympathetic rendering of individual characters along with a refined sense of discrimination and proportion which seeks to place and order these renderings within a larger evaluative context. There is nothing neutral about this balance and detachment, as "sides with no party" might suggest; it is indicative, instead, of a receptiveness and openness motivated by love and qualified by a discriminating fear, which, inasmuch as this involves an "analysis in dramatic form of a complex situation," takes the form, to appropriate

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[78] Q.D. Leavis, "Hawthorne as Poet," *Sewanee Review*, 59 (1951), p. 180.

Melville's phrase once again, of seeking and not finding *yet*. Mrs. Leavis defines, that is, a quality of intelligence that is given over to taking things as they are and as they come, in all their complexity. However, we are now, at last, in a position to see the extent to which *The Scarlet Letter* might confirm and at the same time contradict these claims.

This sense of a reverent balance and detachment is most clearly apparent in the way that Hawthorne has conceived the action of *The Scarlet Letter*--and, consequently, how he has defined and brought to life the dramatic tension which makes the novel move. What Hawthorne presents us with is, generally speaking, an attempt to hold in balance two opposed points of view, both of which are of indispensable value to us and yet are in a profound kind of conflict with each other. This conflict we can describe as between the value we place in a reverence for the private individual, on the one hand, and a reverence for authority, on the other. The resolution of this conflict depends upon the discovery of their points of compatibility; yet these two principles, as they are embodied in the novel, are radically at odds with each other such that a commitment to the one would lead to the obliteration of the other.

The first position--that of the reverence due to the private individual--is primarily defined for us by the sympathy we feel for Hester Prynne and the accompanying judgement we make against the Puritan community as a whole for its irreverent treatment of her. We recognize her, that is, as the victim of a quality of judgement which is almost entirely denuded of sympathetic feeling as she is subjected to the "ever relentless vigor with which society frowned upon her sin" of adultery. This irreverent subjection is taken to the point where she is stripped of her individuality as the community symbolically identifies her with Sin itself. Throughout her years of shame and misery,

> ...she would become the general symbol at which the preacher and moralist might point, and in which they might vivify and embody their images of woman's frailty and sinful passion. Thus the young and pure would be taught to look at her, with the scarlet letter flaming on her breast,--at her, the child of honorable parents,--at her, the mother of a babe, that would hereafter be a woman,--at her, who had once been innocent,--as the figure, the body, the reality of sin.(79)

On the other hand, however, Hawthorne does not obscure the fact from himself, just as he does not permit us to obscure it, that there are determinable limits to the sympathy we can feel for Hester. These limits are defined for us when we find that Hester, provoked by the fact that she has been reduced into an object of universal scorn and that she is, in effect, an outcast, rejects the community in turn. She casts "away the fragments of a broken chain," and, in her solitary speculations, overthrows "the whole system of ancient prejudice, wherewith was linked much of ancient principle." And swept away with ancient prejudice and ancient principle is any regard for the authority of their civil embodiments. Hawthorne, we find, is rather explicit in his disapproval, although he disapproves with the right note of sympathy:

> She had wandered, without rule or guidance, in a moral wilderness; as vast, as intricate and shadowy, as the untamed forest,...Her intellect and heart had their home, as it were, in desert places, where she roamed as freely as the wild Indian in his woods. For years past she had looked from this estranged point of view at human institutions, and whatever priests or legislators had established; criticizing all with hardly more reverence than the Indian would feel for the clerical band, the judicial robe, the pillory, the gallows, the fireside, or the church. The tendency of her fate and fortune had been to set her free. The scarlet letter was her passport to regions where other women dared not tread. Shame, Despair, Solitude! These had been her teachers,--stern and wild ones,--and they had made her strong, but taught her much amiss.(199-200)

But, finally, perhaps the most significant implication of her individualistic assertions is that she feels free to deny the reality of her own sin, inasmuch as she passionately declares to Dimmesdale: "What we did had a consecration of its own." (195)

That we must distance ourselves from such a position is, indeed, a true test of one's capacity for detachment, for we are keenly aware of the factors that do tend to mitigate the seriousness of what Hester has done. There is, of course, the almost purely technical nature of her adultery given that her marriage to Chillingworth was a loveless one and that he had, in effect, abandoned her--and before the adulterous act. Add to this fact that Hester and Dimmesdale constitute the only healthy, loving relationship in the novel, which is thwarted by the severity of the community's judgement and which forces Dimmesdale to deny his true relationship to Hester and to their daughter Pearl. Finally, and in what is probably the greatest test of a reverential detachment, is the wonderfully spontaneous and delicate expression of passion at the precise moment Hester and Dimmesdale decide to leave the colony forever. Hester undoes the clasp which fastens the scarlet letter to her bosom and tosses the letter away. Then, as Hawthorne observes, in a widely and justly praised passage:

> By another impulse, she took off the formal cap that confined her hair; and down it fell upon her shoulders, dark and rich, with at once a shadow and a light in its abundance, and imparting the charm of softness to her features. There played around her mouth, and beamed out of her eyes, a radiant and tender smile, that seemed gushing from the very heart of womanhood. A crimson flush was glowing on her cheek, that had been so long pale. Her sex, her youth, and the whole richness of her beauty, came back from what men call the irrevocable past, and clustered themselves, with their maiden hope, and a happiness before unknown, within the magic circle of this hour.(202)

This is perhaps as close as Hawthorne comes to realizing and making powerfully attractive what Quentin Anderson refers to as "the anarchic possibilities" of the "energies that go into the making of each of us."[16] But the point is that this scene represents the unleashing of the anarchic--and regardless of the provocation, insofar as Hester indulges these impulses, she is as far removed from true judgement as the Puritan community is. If the community errs in judging her overharshly, she errs at the other extreme in seeking to escape the authority of "ancient principle."

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[16] Quentin Anderson, *The Imperial Self* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), p. 79.

But if Hawthorne, with his scrupulous sense of balance and detachment, of sympathy and judgement, makes us aware that there can be no simple acquiescence to the point of view represented by Hester, he also makes us aware that there can be no simple condemnation of the Puritan community. For in spite of their obvious limitations, Hawthorne, nevertheless, makes clear that there is something important to be salvaged from the Puritans' stern attention to moral and social order. If, that is, they fail as a group to show due reverence to the private individual, there is still something to be said for the reverence they accord to authority and its enabling and guiding forms. As Hawthorne observes, in colonial New England, we find that

> what we call talent had far less consideration than now, but the massive materials which produce stability and dignity of character a great deal more. The people possessed, by hereditary right, the quality of reverence; which, in their descendants, if it survive at all, exists in smaller proportion, and with a vastly diminished force in the selection and estimate of public men. The change may be for good or ill, and is partly, perhaps for both. In that old day, the English settler on these rude shores,--having left king, nobles, and all degrees of awful rank behind, while still the faculty and necessity of reverence were strong in him,--bestowed it on the white hair and venerable brow of age; on long-tried integrity; on solid wisdom and sad-colored experience; on endowments of that grave and weighty order, which gives the idea of permanence, and comes under the general definition of respectability.(237-238)

For Hawthorne this reverence shown by the Puritans has significance beyond mere historical fact. It is also a due reverence and this implies that the continued order and stability of a community depends on the ability to recognize and to give one's allegiance to men of wisdom and experience. And this sense of wisdom and experience gives its authority to the Puritan community's stern attitude towards sin, inasmuch as sin is both an inescapable fact and an abiding threat to the order and stability of the community. Hester's punishment can be nothing but a high and serious public moment, attended by men "no less dignified than the Governor, and several of his counsellors, a judge, a general, and the ministers of the town; . . ." Their solemn presence dictates a necessary note of seriousness which, as Hawthorne observes, overpowers and represses anyone of a disposition to "turn the matter into ridicule." Moreover, their presence indicates to all "that the infliction of a legal sentence would have an earnest and effectual meaning."(56) Clearly, then, Hawthorne finds the Puritan community's response to the spectacle of Hester's punishment more fitti~~ng and mo~~re just, for all its brutal disrespect, than, for example, the cynicism of contemporary society. As he observes:

> The scene was not without a mixture of awe, such as must always invest the spectacle of guilt and shame in a fellow-creature, before society shall have grown corrupt enough to smile, instead of shuddering, at it. The witnesses of Hester Prynne's disgrace had not yet passed beyond their simplicity. They were stern enough to look upon her death, had

> that been the sentence, without a murmur at its severity, but had none of the heartlessness of another social state, which would find only a theme for jest in an exhibition like the present.(56)

But Hawthorne's own felt reverence for authority is most impressively realized in his description of the Election Day procession, prior to and following the Election Day sermon:

> Soon the head of the procession showed itself, with a slow and stately march, turning the corner, and making its way across the market-place. First came the music. It comprised a variety of instruments, perhaps imperfectly adapted to one another, and played with no great skill, but yet attaining the great object for which the harmony of drum and clarion addresses itself to the multitude, --that of imparting a higher and more heroic air to the scene of life that passes before the eye. Little Pearl at first clapped her hands, but then lost, for an instant, the restless agitation that kept her in a continual effervescence throughout the morning; she gazed silently, and seemed borne upward, like a floating sea-bird, on the long heaves and swells of sound. But then she was brought back to her former mood by the shimmer of the sunshine on the weapons and bright armour of the military company, which followed after the music, and formed the honorary escort of the procession. This body of soldiery--which still sustains a corporate existence, and marches down from past ages with an ancient and honorable fame--was composed of no mercenary materials. Its ranks were filled with gentlemen, who felt the stirrings of martial impulse and sought to establish a kind of College of Arms, where as in an association of Knights Templars, they might learn the science, and, so far as peaceful exercise would teach them, the practices of war....
>
> And yet the men of civil eminence, who came immediately behind the military escort, were better worth a thoughtful observer's eye. Even in outward demeanor they showed a stamp of majesty that made the warrior's haughty stride look vulgar, if not absurd....They had fortitude and self-reliance, and, in time of difficulty or peril, stood up for the welfare of the state like a line of cliffs against a tempestuous tide....

> Next in order to the magistrates came the young and eminently distinguished divine, from whose lips the religious discourse of the anniversary was expected. His was the profession, at that era, in which intellectual ability displayed itself far more than in political life; for--leaving a higher motive out of the question--it offered inducements powerful enough, in the almost worshipping respect of the community, to win the most aspiring ambition into its service. (236-237)

Marius Bewley has called attention to this passage, remarking that "it has the effect of powerfully personifying the society from which Hester's and Dimmesdale's sin has alienated them." It asserts a continuity between the Puritans and the larger world of "a more-than-Puritan society" in the way that it establishes the essential impressiveness and efficacy of Puritan public life.[11] This is certainly true, I think, and I have quoted the passage at such length in order to show how this effect is captured in the overall movement of the passage. For just as Hawthorne states at the beginning that "the procession showed itself, with a slow and stately march", so does his style shape itself around this fact.

The prose is measured by the notation of what groups make up the procession--"First came the music," followed by the military escort, then the "men of civil eminence," and, finally, "the young and eminently distinguished divine." The sense of slowness and stateliness derives from the lingering but carefully articulated definition which is due to each estate--the military, the civil and the ecclesiastic--and which, in turn, fills out the movement as a whole. Interestingly enough, Pearl is present in the passage, and Hawthorne's purpose here is, I think, to call additional attention to the fact that this studied articulation of order and form has an order-inducing effect on the most dissonant elements, as represented by Pearl, and is capable of absorbing them--although it is also significant that she resumes her disorderly effervescence after momentarily being caught up "in the long heaves and swells of sound." The implication is that this is an accommodation that the Puritans have not yet learned to make and a degree of delicacy they have not learned to discriminate, accustomed as they are to bracing themselves against "tempestuous tides."

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[11] Marius Bewley, *The Eccentric Design* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), p. 163.

Thus, there is in Hawthorne's style a sense of action--the action of sympathetically participating in the rehearsal of a great public ritual. This careful articulation of form and order is, after all, the essence of a ritual, which serves to announce, define and reconfirm the aims of permanence and stability which are the ground of communal life. It also serves, as a part of this, to display a sense that everything and everyone is confirmed within an order in which all is in place. And as Hawthorne is aware, the need to feel that one is a part of this movement is as basic and elemental as the need for love. This awareness emerges later, after Dimmesdale has delivered the Election Day sermon, where Hawthorne, again, traces the movement of the procession:

> Now was heard again the clangor of the music, and the measured tramp of the military escort, issuing from the church-door. The procession was to be marshalled thence to the town-hall, where a solemn banquet would complete the ceremonies of the day.
>
> Once more, therefore, the train of venerable and majestic fathers was seen moving through a broad pathway of the people, who drew back reverently, on either side, as the Governor and magistrates, the old and wise men, the holy ministers, and all that were eminent and renowned, advanced into the midst of them.

Then,

> When they were fairly in the market place, their presence was greeted by a shout. This--though doubtless it might acquire additional force and volume from the childlike loyalty which the age awarded to its rulers--was felt to be an irrepressible outburst of enthusiasm kindled in the auditors by that high strain of eloquence which was yet reverberating in their ears. Each felt the impulse in himself, and, in the same breath caught it from his neighbour....There were human beings enough, and enough of highly wrought and symphonious feeling, to produce that more impressive sound than the organ-tones of the blast, or the thunder, or the roar of the sea; even that mighty swell of many voices, blended into one great voice by the universal impulse which makes likewise one vast heart out of many.(250)

This is, I think, another application of what Mrs. Leavis pointed out about Hawthorne. She observes, speaking of his rendering of the radiant vitality of Zenobia in *The Blithedale Romance*: "The true artist, he has the indispensible genius for knowing, and communicating, where life flows and wherein lies its value and health."[78]

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[78] Q.D. Leavis, p. 453.

Nevertheless,--and this is the pass to which Hawthorne's reverent intelligence has led us--the two positions defined by a reverence for the individual and a reverence for authority are, it would seem, at an absolute distance from each other. For there is no satisfactory separation of order from brutality just as there is no satisfactory separation of the private individual from moral and, hence, sinful isolation. This is the sense, then, in which a commitment to the one demands the obliteration of the other.

The resolution of this conflict requires one final public ritual--the tragic catastrophe--for which the festivities of Election Day set the stage. This is played through Dimmesdale who is himself perhaps the most revered public figure in the community and whose commitment to the community is perhaps the most intense and yet, because of his concealed sin, is also the most completely isolated from it. Yet, his confession induces that necessary adjustment of the community with the individual and, accordingly, a more perfect adjustment of sympathy and judgement at the revelation of sin. By the end of the novel, we find, indeed, that this adjustment has been made by the community as a whole in their view of Hester. After Dimmesdale's death, Hester "resumes" the scarlet letter and, as we are informed,

> Never afterwards did it quit her bosom. But, in the lapse of the toilsome, thoughtful, and self-devoted years that made up Hester's life, the scarlet letter ceased to be a stigma which attracted the world's scorn and bitterness and became a type of something

> to be sorrowed over, and looked upon with awe, yet with reverence too.(263)

Reverence, in this context, is the full consciousness of sympathy evoked by this sorrow and a sense of judgement which is motivated by "an immediate and active fear"--as the *O.E.D.* defines "awe"--and which consequently withdraws into a detached distance.

But before taking up the way Hawthorne handles the tragic catastrophe, it is first necessary to make note of certain difficulties in the style--of the more minute details of arrangement and selection, as opposed to the broader movement and conception of the action--which work against the reverent balance and attachment we have noted so far. The most obvious instance is found in the way Hawthorne handles sexual passion. For, in spite of Hawthorne's powerful and tactful presentation of Hester letting her hair down in the forest, he too often retreats into the sentimental alienation from a subject and thus the imprecision of style which we noted in "The Custom-House" sketch. We feel no sense of loss, for example, in the way that Hawthorne describes Hester's advancing sternness and severity: "All the light and graceful foliage of her character had been withered up. . .and had long ago fallen away, . . ." And, elsewhere: ". . .there seemed to be no longer any thing in Hester's face for Love to dwell upon; nothing in Hester's form, though majestic and statue-like, that Passion would ever dream of clasping in its embrace;

nothing in Hester's bosom, to make it ever again the pillow of Affection."(163) In this light, we cannot consistently feel the powerful conflict implicit in Quentin Anderson's claim that "a man is loose, a woman is loose, and they are at the same time minister and parishioner."[11] If we could, we would have a novel with the power of *Anna Karenina*--a work which Mrs. Leavis connects up with *The Scarlet Letter*, but it is still true that any connection we make between the two works begins to falter if we move very far beyond the schematic similarities. The final result of Hawthorne's imperception here is that it slackens the sort of tension we need to feel if we are to place *The Scarlet Letter* on the same plane as *Anna Karenina*.

More serious difficulties arise in Hawthorne's treatment of Dimmesdale which call into question Hawthorne's capacity for a critical sympathy. These difficulties are evident, for example, in Chapter X, in which the vengeful Chillingworth finally uncovers Dimmesdale's secret:

> It came to pass,...that the Reverend Mr. Dimmesdale, at noonday, and entirely unawares, fell into a deep slumber, sitting in his chair, with a large black-letter volume open before him on the table. It must have been a work of vast ability in the somniferous school of literature. The profound depth of the minister's repose was the more remarkable; inasmuch as he was one of those persons whose sleep, ordinarily, is as light, as fitful, and as easily scared away, as a small bird hopping on a twig. To such unwonted remoteness, however, had his spirit now withdrawn into itself, that he stirred not in his chair, when old Roger Chillingworth, without any extraordinary precaution, came into the room.

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[11] Quentin Anderson, p. 73.

Hawthorne's gentlemanly restraint and forbearance is clearly operative here, for, in the absence of any direct knowledge of Chillingworth's plot, we can only infer that Chillingworth has drugged Dimmesdale. And with the same forbearance, Hawthorne firmly refuses to indulge his--and our--curiosity about what Chillingworth discovers on Dimmesdale's breast and what turns out to be of vital interest to him:

> The physician advanced directly in front of his patient, laid his hand upon his bosom, and thrust aside the vestment, that, hitherto, had always covered it even from the professional eye.
>
> Then, indeed, Mr. Dimmesdale shuddered, and slightly stirred.
>
> After a brief pause, the physician turned away.
>
> But with what a wild look of wonder, joy, and horror! With what ghastly rapture, as it were, too mighty to be expressed only by the eye and features, and therefore bursting forth through the whole ugliness of his figure, and making itself even riotously manifest by the extravagant gestures with which he threw up his arms towards the ceiling, and stamped his foot on the floor! Had a man seen old Roger Chillingworth, at the moment of his ecstacy, he would have had no need to ask how Satan comports himself, when a precious human soul is lost to heaven, and won to his kingdom.(138)

One peculiarity of this passage is our sense that Hawthorne, with his firm and, indeed, rather stiff forbearance, is asserting a certain distance between himself and his audience. The suppression of one's curiosity in this instance is certainly a necessary response if one is to resist violating the sanctity of the private heart; but Hawthorne is clearly more concerned with dictating his audience's response than with controlling his own. There is an explanation and even a justification for this, if we recall for a moment Hawthorne's expression of distrust in the corrupt moral sensitivities of contemporary society "which would find a theme for jest" in the revelation of sin. His firmness and stiffness would then sufficiently indicate that he does not, to his credit, feel himself subject to the same pressures.

However, there is no struggle here, as we find with Daniel Deronda, with the very real problem of regulating one's desire to *know* and of working out the proper balance between "a love of knowledge" and "the finest capacity for ignorance." Indeed, Hawthorne's forbearance has the feel of a strict application of a rule conduct--"the gentleman is not suspicious" or "the gentleman is not curious"--and lends an air of detached competence which strikes a false note. Who, after all, wouldn't feel curiosity, particularly given the fact that Hawthorne intensifies, in an almost calculated way, this curiosity in his Gothic-tainted depiction of Chillingworth's response? Yet Hawthorne's style at this point simply does not bend to accommodate this problem because Hawthorne does not feel any sense of sympathetic involvement with it. It is an instance of what Julian Hawthorne has described for us as not drinking square.

The self-satisfied independence, however, leads us to the other kind of sentimental alienation that we have learned to detect in Hawthorne. For if he is susceptible to an excessive detachment, he also swings to the other extreme represented by the Man of Feeling. For example, in Chapter XI, after Chillingworth has made sufficiently clear that Dimmesdale is Hester's partner in sin, Hawthorne attempts to enter Dimmesdale's guilt-ridden consciousness and to render its movements with sympathetic and tactful care:

> In these lengthened vigils, [Dimmesdale's] brain often reeled, and visions seemed to flit before him; perhaps seen doubtfully, and by a faint light of their own, in the remote dimness of the chamber, or more vividly and close beside him, within the looking glass. Now it was a herd of diabolic shapes, that grinned and mocked at the pale minister, and beckoned him away with them; now a group of shining angels, who flew upward heavily, as sorrow-laden, but grew more ethereal as they rose. Now came the dead friends of his youth, and his white bearded father, with a saint-like frown, and his mother, turning her face as she passed by. Ghost of a mother,--thinnest fantasy of a mother,--methinks she might have thrown a pitying glance towards her son! And now, through the chamber which these spectral thoughts made so ghastly, glided Hester Prynne, leading along little Pearl, in her Scarlet garb, and pointing her forefinger, first, at the scarlet letter on her bosom, and then at the clergyman's own breast.(145)

There is, of course, no real sympathetic and submissive contact established here. If there is sympathy, it is breathless sympathy and, with this, Hawthorne succeeds only in achieving an intrusively excessive delicacy.

Indeed, one wonders at times whether or not Hawthorne is actually mocking his own delicacy, and by implication, mocking the objects of his delicate attention, especially with regard to Dimmesdale. In fact, such delicacy has the effect of ironic and particularly unfeeling judgement. For example, we note Hawthorne's observations of Dimmesdale, who, fresh from his encounter with Hester in the forest, is having difficulty repressing his wicked impulses:

> Before the minister had time to celebrate his victory over this last temptation, he was conscious of another impulse, more ludicrous, and almost as horrible. It was,--we blush to tell it,--it was to stop short in the road, and teach some very wicked words to a knot of little Puritan children who were playing there, and had but just begun to talk.(220)

Dimmesdale overcomes this temptation. But Hawthorne's gesture of delicacy here is entirely out of proportion with the nature of this impulse and has the effect of mocking the seriousness with which Dimmesdale appears to take the incident. There is also the ironic note of shock on Hawthorne's part over the next incident, as Dimmesdale is tempted to consort with a drunken seaman: ". . .poor Mr. Dimmesdale longed, at least, to shake hands with the tarry blackguard, and recreate himself with a few improper jests, such as dissolute sailors so abound with, and a volley of good, round, solid, satisfactory, and heaven defying oaths!"(220) Is this the manner of a man who has just cast off, in his pact with Hester to leave Boston, the authority of the community and is wrestling with his now unleashed anarchic energies? We are aware, of course, just as Hawthorne is aware, that all of this is pretty tame stuff and one is hard pressed, as a result, to take Dimmesdale any more seriously than Hawthorne does at this point. But the effect is to undercut the allegiance that we feel for him and thus further slacken the dramatic tension of the novel.

But, turning to the tragic catastrophe itself, we find that Hawthorne recovers this reverent balance and detachment impressively. The final movement of the novel begins with Dimmesdale suddenly extending "his hand to the woman of the scarlet letter" in view of the assembled community: "Come Hester, come! Support me up yonder scaffold." With this,

> The crowd was in tumult. The men of rank and dignity, who stood more immediately around the clergyman, were so taken by surprise and so perplexed as to the purport of what they saw,--unable to receive the explanation which most readily presented itself, or to imagine any other,--that they remained silent and inactive spectators of the judgement which Providence seemed about to work.(253)

Then,

> Partly supported by Hester Prynne, and holding one hand of little Pearl's, the Reverend Mr. Dimmesdale turned to the dignified and venerable rulers; to the holy ministers, who were his brethren; to the people, whose great heart was thoroughly appalled, yet overflowing with tearful sympathy, as knowing that some deep life matter--which, if full of sin, was full of anguish and repentance likewise--was now laid open to them. The sun, but a little past its meridian, shone down upon the clergyman, and gave a distinctness to his figure, as he stood out from all the earth to put in his plea of guilty at the bar of Eternal Justice.(254)

Thus, the sight of the most revered man among them about to confess his sin induces the community into a spontaneously reverential response, inasmuch as the "great heart of the people was thoroughly appalled, yet overflowing with tearful sympathy." This capacity for sympathy, as we are made aware of throughout the novel, is present in this great heart--and suddenly finds a place in the one public drama that could bring it alive.

The passage is so finely executed that one feels that the note of majesty is not in the least predetermined by Hawthorne's use of repetition, periodic structure and antithesis; rather, one feels that these are the forms that majesty, deliberation and control naturally take hold of. Hawthorne, through a series of prepositional phrases, follows Dimmesdale as he turns to all the different elements of the assembled community in order of precedence--repeating again the formal articulations Hawthorne makes during the procession. The action of "laying open" is suspended until the very end of the clause, at the point of greatest emphasis, thus delicately enunciating a merging of the public and private, of sympathy and judgement. Our sense of this merger stems from the passive construction ("as knowing that some deep life matter. . .was now laid open to them.") for, while it sits in a context of heartfelt sympathy for the sinner and a sensitivity for the "deep life matter" of an individual's soul, it subdues, without obliterating, the agency of the suffering self in "laying open" in favor of the action of "laying open" itself. The concern here is properly with the revelation of some important truth about human nature which entails tragically exposing "the phantom of human merit." In the sentence that follows, Hawthorne carefully holds the reverence due to the private individual and the reverence due to the authority of communal judgement in balance, for as he carefully notes: "The sun, but a little past its meridian, shone down upon the clergyman, and gave a distinctness to his figure, as he stood out from all the earth to put in his plea of guilty. . . ." The implication is that although Dimmesdale, as he stands at the bar of Eternal Justice, is merely an agent of revelation, his integrity as an individual is given a due distinctness.

Before proceeding any further into the final scene, however, it seems particularly appropriate to draw once again upon F.R. Leavis' remarks on tragic impersonality, for they prove to be of considerable value in illuminating the quality of understanding that Hawthorne--through Dimmesdale--attempts to arrive at. As Leavis says, in a passage that I did not quote before, "the tragic experience, however it is to be defined, is certainly not anything that encourages or permits, an indulgence in the dramatization of one's nobly-suffering self."[60] Othello, as he goes on to point out, is an obvious instance of the self-dramatizing sufferer. Then he goes on to his own famous definition:

> The sense of heightened life that goes with the tragic experience is conditioned by a transcending of the ego--an escape from all attitudes of self-assertion....Actually the experience is constructive or creative, and involves a recognizing of positive value as in some way defined and vindicated by death. It is as if we were challenged at the profoundest level with the question, 'In what does the significance of life reside?', and found ourselves contemplating, for answer, a view of life, and of the things giving it value, that makes the valued unquestionably more important than the valuer, so that the significance lies, clearly and

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[60] F.R. Leavis, "Tragedy and the 'Medium,'" p. 255.

> inescapably, in the willing adhesion of the individual self to something other than itself.

Hawthorne, as we shall see, traces the process by which Dimmesdale does finally escape all attitudes of self-assertion in his willing subordination of himself to the "valued."

The process resumes after Dimmesdale has climbed the scaffold:

> 'People of New England!' cried he, with a voice that rose over them, high, solemn, and majestic,--yet had always a tremor through it, and sometimes a shriek, struggling up out of a fathomless depth of remorse and woe,--'ye, that have loved me!--ye, that have deemed me holy! behold me here, the one sinner of the world!'(254)

At first, Dimmesdale is rather too conscious of himself as the noble sufferer inasmuch as he describes himself as "the one sinner in the world." And, shortly after this, it appears that he may not be able to continue with his full disclosure. Nevertheless, he overcomes his faintness of heart and continues:

> 'It was on him!' he continued, with a kind of fierceness; so determined was he to speak out the whole. 'God's eye beheld it! The angels were forever pointing at it! The Devil knew it well and fretted it continually with the touch of his burning finger! But he hid it cunningly from men, and walked among you with the mien of a spirit, mournful, because so pure in a sinful world!--and sad, because he missed his heavenly kindred! Now, at the death hour, he stands before you! He bids you look up again at Hester's scarlet letter! He tells you, that, with all its mysterious horror, it is but the shadow of what he bears on his own breast, and that even this, his own red stigma, is no more than the type of what has seared his inmost heart.(255)

Dimmesdale himself, at this point, has acquired a sense of reverent balance and detachment, of tragic impersonality as is indicated by his shift from the first person to the third person. It has, on the other hand, been argued that Dimmesdale, in making such a shift, is purposely obscuring his guilt from himself and from the community.[81] But the true significance of the shift lies in the fact that Dimmesdale has mustered the will to suppress his nobly-suffering self. The passage is, in this sense, a judgement, of Dimmesdale's state of mind in Chapter XI ("The Interior of a Heart"):

> He longed to speak out, from his own pulpit, at the full height of his voice, and tell the people what he was. 'I, whom you behold in these black garments of the priesthood,--I, who ascend the sacred desk, and turn my pale face heavenward, taking upon myself to hold communion, in your behalf, with the Most High Omniscience,--I, in whose daily life you discern the sanctity of Enoch,--I, whose footsteps, as you suppose, leave a gleam along my earthly track, whereby the pilgrims that shall come after me may be guided to the regions of the blest,--I, who have breathed the parting prayer over your dying friends, to whom the Amen sounded faintly from a world which they had quitted,--I, your pastor, whom you so reverence and trust, am utterly a pollution and a lie!(143)

This passage, with its repeated emphasis on the "I", along with the emphatic effect of the suspension of the predicate--"am utterly a pollution and a lie"--provides us with a fairly clear instance of the nobly-suffering self, and it is this kind of egotistical indulgence that

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[81] See Edward H. Davidson, "Dimmesdale's Fall," *New England Quarterly*, 36 (1963), 358-370.

Dimmesdale wishes to resist. When he confesses, that is, he does not intrude his nobly-suffering self, as the "valuer", but pays, instead, full attention to the larger issue at hand. It is at this point, then, when we realize that Hawthorne, Dimmesdale and the community are united together in a reverent and impersonal judgement of sin.

However, the fact remains that, as powerful as the conclusion to *The Scarlet Letter* is, its power is limited by Hawthorne's inability to sustain consistently the dramatic tensions which provide the necessary foundation for and which provoke their tragic resolution. When we turn to *Billy Budd*, we will see how Herman Melville handles a similar kind and degree of dramatic tension without losing grip, as Hawthorne does at critical moments, on the reverent balance and detachment necessary for great art.

VI. From *The Scarlet Letter* to *Billy Budd*

There is, as I have claimed in the Introduction, an indisputable continuity between *The Scarlet Letter* and *Billy Budd, Sailor* which is recognizable and measurable in a variety of ways. One notices, for example, certain correspondences in structure, theme, and detail. Both Hawthorne and Melville, in these particular works, share the same cultural and tragic theme, which involves exploring the conflict between community and individual and, as an outgrowth of this, of working towards the discovery of the essential conditions of community. Q.D. Leavis points out in her essay on Hawthorne how Melville has appropriated and adapted Hawthorne's portrayal of Dimmesdale's confession and turned it into the execution scene in *Billy Budd*.[82] This plausibility suggests other correspondences as well, for we can see that Melville's treatment of the events leading up to and including the execution of Billy Budd is reminiscent of the manner in which, as Marius Bewley has observed, Hawthorne enacts the tragic crisis of *The Scarlet Letter* "against the background of civil and military order, which powerfully personifies that society."[83] There is even a similarity in the movement of the prose in both novels during the unfolding of the action at their respective critical points.

These broad similarities of intention and execution raise, of course, the whole question of influence--the kind of influence which serves for the later author as a kind of point of departure from the earlier's example, a point from which the later author can follow new scents. Indeed, one feels that the connection between these two writers in these two novels invites the kind of treatment Marius Bewley gave to the connection between Hawthorne and Henry James in *The Complex Fate*.[84] This, of course, would be a complicated undertaking--one, I think that Bewley would have performed himself had he not, strangely enough, seen so little of interest in *Billy Budd*.[85] But the limits imposed by this study permit one to focus on the particularly palpable influence that Hawthorne had on Melville in matters of style, for it becomes clear, that after *Moby-Dick* and *Pierre*, Melville discovers his staple style in the manner of the man of society.

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[82] Q.D. Leavis, p. 433.
[83] Bewley, *The Eccentric Design*, p. 163.

This is a claim that is bound to raise disagreement, especially with regard to *Billy Budd*. For one thing we notice about Melville's style is how far removed it seems from the "just, the easy, and the natural" movement of the gentlemanly style, especially as it is exemplified by Hawthorne. We do encounter numerous instances of convoluted syntax and recondite reference. There is, at times, the strain of Johnsonian translation; a good stiff drink for Captain Graveling becomes "a fertilizing decoction of strong waters." As a result, we very often feel we are in the presence of, as Brian Lee has aptly observed, a "Victorian-American civil servant" investigating what he feels to be recondite matters.[86] We also note abrupt modulations in manner and tone as Melville will occasionally try to strike the heroic note in a noticeably grand style as he does here with Nelson, on the eve of his death:

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[84] Bewley, *The Complex Fate* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1952). Bewley, of course, is not the only one to explore this connection. The single most important study, aside from Bewley's, is, of course, F.O. Matthiessen's *The American Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957).

[85] Bewley, *The Eccentric Design*, p. 192. He says that *Billy Budd* is "at best, a very partial recovery after the collapse following *Moby-Dick*, and a rather uninteresting recovery at that." This is certainly the most perplexing judgement he has made and, at the same time, certainly the least defensible.

> At Trafalgar Nelson on the brink of opening the fight sat down and wrote his last brief will and testament. If under the presentiment of the most magnificent of all victories to be crowned by his glorious death, a sort of priestly motive led him to dress his person in the jewelled vouchers of his own shining deeds;...(58)

This is not in any sense gentlemanly talk; still, Warner Berthoff's observations on Melville's late style indicate to us the necessity of discussing Melville's style in terms of its gentlemanly motives. After Melville had turned away from the Baroque *bouillabaise* of *Moby-Dick* and the mannerism of *Pierre* to the manner of the short story in the 1850's, we find that, as Berthoff points out:

> An increasing reserve and restraint are to be felt with regard to philosophic assessments, and are felt

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[86] See Brian Lee, "*Billy Budd*, The American *Hard Times*," *English*, 32 (1983), 35-54 and C.N. Manlove, "An Organic Hesitancy: Theme and Style in *Billy Budd*," in *New Perspectives on Melville*, ed. Faith Pullen (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1978), pp. 275-300, for two very astute treatments of Melville's style.

> moreover as a positive resource. So, too, certain high dramatic moments are deliberately left undescribed, becoming in fact the more impressive through the narrator's pointed refusal to take them up in his regular fashion. A profounder tact, a more intense respect for persons and what is ultimately required of them, seems responsible for this change of manner, rather than any doctrinaire skepticism or ironic derogation of traditional understanding. 'The half shall here remain untold,' Melville writes of the Chola widow, Hunilla. 'These two unnamed events that befell Hunilla on the isle, let them abide between her and God. In nature, as in law, it may be libelous to speak some truths.' The greatest fiction, perhaps, cannot withdraw into silence this way. But it is possible to feel a singular humanity, and civility, in writing that chooses to do so out of its own measured strength of intimation.[67]

And this manner is the bridge over the forty-year gap between the 1850's and the composition of *Billy Budd*, for, as Berthoff rightly notes, "the tact and forbearance he had come round to in the middle 1850's are resumed as if there had been no interruption."[68]

It is appropriate and necessary to speak of Hawthorne's influence on Melville's style and even to regard it as an influence of a direct and intimate sort rather than to treat the apparent similarities as an indication that they merely shared the same commitment to the gentlemanly style. For it was through Hawthorne that Melville eventually came to comprehend the intellectual and emotional capacities of the style of the man of society. There is Melville's own declaration of this in his review of *Mosses from an Old Manse*. We have already looked at Melville's discussion of the gentleman seeker of truth and of his heuristic and submissive disposition for "seeking and not finding yet." But throughout the review we see how Melville constantly credits Hawthorne with the gentlemanly balance of head and heart. Hawthorne, he finds, is "content with the still, rich utterances of a great intellect in repose. . .which sends few thoughts into circulation, except they be arterialized at his large warm lungs, and expanded in his honest heart."[89] Hawthorne, he observes elsewhere in the review, has no "common heart." His tales argue a "depth of tenderness, such a boundless sympathy with all forms of being, such an omnipresent love, . . ."[90] And, further on,

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[67] Warner Berthoff, intro., *The Great Short Works of Herman Melville*, pp. 16-17.
[68] Berthoff, p. 17.

> ...there is no man in whom humor and love are developed in that high form called genius--no such man can exist without also possessing, as the indispensable complement of these, a great, deep intellect, which drops down into the universe like a plummet. Or, love and humor are only the eyes through which such an intellect views this world.[91]

And, again, it is this combination of love and intellect--the constituent elements of reverential attention--that gives Hawthorne access to the profoundest truths of human nature, to the sense that "no man can weigh this world without throwing in something, somehow like Original Sin, to strike the uneven balance."[92] This is an example of the reverent openness which, again, yields, as Melville observed of Hawthorne, the capacity to apprehend

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[89] Leyda, p. 408.
[90] Leyda, p. 404.
[91] Leyda, p. 405.
[92] Leyda, p. 406.

"the absolute condition of present things as they strike the eye of the man who fears them not, though they do their worst to him, . . ."

It is understandable, then, that Melville would find so much wanting in a writer like Washington Irving, whom Hawthorne was often compared to by contemporary reviewers. Hawthorne's apparently "pleasant style" placed him, in the eyes of many, in the same tradition. Melville charitably refers to Irving as "that graceful writer"--although in a letter to Evert Duyckinck, he less charitably refers to Irving as a "grasshopper" compared to Hawthorne[93]--who "owes his chief reputation to the self-acknowledged imitation of a foreign model, and the studied avoidance of all topics but smooth ones." Irving, in Melville's judgement, lacks "originality" and by this he means to oppose originality to the slavish imitation of literary models. Melville's criticism is that Irving denied himself original contact with his subjects and, accordingly, has severely restricted the emotional and intellectual capacity of his style. Melville had, of course, his axe to grind in the interests of literary nationalism: ". . .there is no hope for us in these smooth, pleasing writers. . . .we want no American Goldsmiths; nay, we want no American Miltons." But Melville was also acutely aware that American writers had to satisfy the conditions for great writing generally; there could be no great American writers unless one could establish a perceptual immediacy and an active emotional and intellectual involvement with the facts of his own experience. Indeed, he does not mean, as he says, "that all American writers should studiously cleave to nationality in their writings; only this, no American should write like an Englishman, or a Frenchman; let him write like a man, for then he will be sure to write like an American."[14] "Let him write like a man," of course, echoes the ancient criticisms of the doctrine of imitation, which were carried forward by Pascal, Bouhours and Fenelon and transmitted to the nineteenth-century by way of Hugh Blair and others. Originality consists of writing "like a Man and not an Author." And Hawthorne, as a gentleman seeker of truth, can only be so because he is, as Melville observes of him, "an unimitating, and perhaps, in his way, an inimitable man."[15]

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[93] "To E.A. Duyckinck," 12 February, 1851, Letter 81, *The Letters of Herman Melville*, eds. Merrill R. Davis and William H. Gilman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), p. 121.

"Originality" as such is perhaps congruent with Romantic individualism, or, at least, has Romantic associations. However, it is not to be confused with or equated with unique expression. The notion of imitation still obtains to the extent that one acquires for oneself, from the example of others, the motivating attitudes of mind which secure a necessary original openness before experience. It is fair and safe to say that the quality of mind displayed by Hawthorne that impressed Melville the most, and which had a lasting influence on him, was

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[14] Leyda, p. 413.
[15] Leyda, p. 414.

Hawthorne's capacity for reverence, as that capacity which gives one an original access to "the absolute condition of present things." It is, moreover, a motivating attitude which for Melville, as it did for Hawthorne, would find its natural and available form in the style of the man of society.

Billy Budd, Sailor is perhaps the finest application of what Melville learned from the example of Hawthorne. It is an extraordinary re-working of Hawthorne's great tragic theme of the conflict of individual and community. But, more significantly, it shows us how much more completely aware Melville was of the capacities and the demands of the gentlemanly style than Hawthorne ever was. Like Hawthorne, Melville knew that there is an indissoluble link between wisdom and eloquence. Both writers, that is, sought that necessary decorum, that particular range and adequacy of expression which could give body to and, accordingly, which could comprehend the tragic experience. And both writers understood that "adequacy" as such requires a critical intelligence, which, in fact, is nothing more nor less than a style, which maintains a balance between sympathetic involvement and critical judgement. Nevertheless, Hawthorne, as we have seen, sacrifices sympathetic response to judgement so that we often sense that he withdraws contact from the "absolute condition of present things." He strikes us, at critical moments, as one of the "strong and stern men," described with disdain by D.H. Lawrence--the sort of men whose "strength lies in their insusceptibility to half the influences that deflect morality."’‘ Melville, on the other hand, was successful, as we will see, in overcoming the sentimental alienation that troubles Hawthorne's greatest work. He is, indeed, more fully and consistently the gentleman seeker of truth who enters the Intelligence Office, whose honesty of mind, whose delicate power of discrimination and enabling affection, along with his ability to give this reverent combination a body, makes him the greater writer.

To show this, we must first give an account of the action of the story, of, that is, the trajectory traced by what George Whalley has called "the mutually defining interaction of plot and character."’’ For, as we have seen before, the conception and conduct of the action is difficult, if not impossible to seperate from style. There is, indeed, an important sense in which the style and the action are mutually defining as well and that each is a kind of evidence, on a small and large scale, respectively, of Melville's directing honesty of mind and affectionate delicacy.

The action is as follows: Billy Budd, a radically innocent young man who, by virtue of his exceptional beauty and strength, invites comparison with the legendary

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’‘"To Blanche Jennings," 4 November, 1908, *The Collected Letters of D.H. Lawrence*, I, 34, (New York: The Viking Press, 1962).

’’George Whalley, "The Aristotle-Coleridge Axis," *The University of Toronto Quarterly*, 42 (1972), 98.

"Handsome Sailor," is impressed into service on board a British man-of-war, the *Bellipotent*, during the wars of the French Revolution. Once on board, Billy draws the attention of Claggart, the master-at-arms, whose envious and subtly malicious hatred of Billy is as exceptional in its purity as is Billy's *naivete*. Claggart, for no other motive, it would seem, than the very aspect of Budd's innocent beauty, proceeds to plot against him. After a series of minor incidents, Claggart sends his agent, Squeek, to try to involve Billy in a plan of mutiny and who offers to bribe him to do so. Billy is angered by this and, in his excitement, begins to stutter, a disposition of Billy's which Melville has alerted us to earlier in the story and which Claggart, who is standing nearby and, no doubt, a witness to the exchange of Billy and Squeek, will soon take advantage of.

On the basis of the last incident, Claggart finally goes before the captain of the ship, Vere, and accuses Billy of mutinous conspiracy of which Billy is technically guilty because he did not report the incident with Squeek, although, of course, he is innocent of intent. Vere, accordingly, summons Billy to his cabin to face his accuser. But when Claggart repeats his accusation, Billy is so astonished and outraged that he cannot speak--a problem magnified by his stutter--and he strikes Claggart in frustration, at the same time killing him with the blow.

The focus of attention now shifts to Captain Vere, who alone is capable of understanding the situation and, much to his own suffering, is aware of what must be done. In his private judgement, he knows that Billy is blameless--indeed, he is deeply touched by the young man's innocent nature, just as he is suspicious of Claggart's motives in accusing Billy. But his sense of duty forces him to attend to the fact that Billy, in merely striking Claggart, has committed a capital crime under the terms of the Mutiny Act. In addition, Vere has an urgent and practical concern for the security of the ship and is accordingly convinced that Billy must be tried and executed. The sense of urgency stems from the fact that it is, after all, wartime. Moreover, the Nore and Spithead mutinies are still fresh in the memories of both officers and crew and any sign of hesitancy in applying the letter of the law would be interpreted by the crew as a sign of weakness, a weakness they would likely take advantage of. It is a potentially explosive situation, aggravated by the fact that the mutinies, particularly the mutiny at the Nore, were insurrections of a massive scale and were inspired by the same ideological fervor that had overwhelmed France under the Directory. England's ability to make a stand against the dissolution of civilized authority on the Continent was, accordingly, dangerously compromised.

The situation on board ship, then, is an image of the broader conflict--indeed, it is an instance of it. Vere makes his decision to apply the letter of the law to Billy with the awareness that not only is military order at risk but that it is the last line of defense of a civilized community, the survival and integrity of which is threatened both from without and within. Vere's actions, based as they are on a sincerely felt necessity for order and the maintenance of the rule of law, a position hardened by the absence of it in Europe and the threat to it in the Navy itself, form the moral centre of the story.

But Melville by no means permits an easy acquiescence to the authority of the law, in spite of the compelling reasons to submit to it. The moral center is held at extraordinary cost and against the almost irresistible pull of sympathetic feeling for Billy, aroused by the radical injustice of his inevitable execution. For, in the present circumstances, given Billy's nature--and not just Vere but the whole crew is touched by it--Vere's actions, at least from the point of view sympathetic to Billy, appear to constitute something like the perfect act of injustice. The Mutiny Act, as Vere's guiding principle, is, in the same way, the instrument of perfect injustice as could only be brought to light by a case as exceptional as Billy's. No one has a tighter grip on this fact than Vere, whose deliberations Melville anticipates:

> In the jugglery of circumstances preceding and attending the event on board the *Bellipotent*, and in the light of that martial code whereby it was formally to be judged, innocence and guilt personified in Claggart and Budd in effect changed places. In a legal view the apparent victim of the tragedy was he who had sought to victimize a man blameless; and the indisputable deed of the latter, navally regarded, constituted the most heinous of military crimes. Yet more. The essential right and wrong involved in the matter, the clearer that might be, so much the worse

> for the responsibility of the loyal sea commander, inasmuch as he was not authorized to determine the matter on that primitive basis.(103)

The clarity of the essential right and wrong in the case, thus only clarifies how completely irrelevant this determination is to the administration of the Act. Submission to the Act and its implications requires nothing short of a tragic self-annihilating surrender and a heroic sense of duty. For Vere, in particular, this means the surrender of his almost paternal and protective love for a helpless innocent in favor of a deeply felt allegiance to order and its activating forms and usages as a condition of civilization. Moreover, it is an order which we now understand as a condition of justice and, for that matter, mercy and which ruthlessly demands, given the circumstances on board the *Bellipotent*, even the slaughter of the innocent.

The tension then between the principles of order and justice--and the allegiance due to each--is extreme, a product, finally, of how the action is conceived and how it falls out. That is, in a time of war and national emergency, the most purely innocent of men is victimized by the most purely malicious, and kills him in an act of pure natural justice; and yet is tried, found guilty and executed according to the most purely authoritarian and unjust of laws, administered by a man, who, nevertheless, with great honesty of mind, understands emotionally and intellectually both sides of the issue and whose decision to apply the law one *must*, finally, give one's assent to. Not that there is, however, any uncertainty over what Vere will choose to do and what principle will emerge as his guide, for his awareness of what must be done--and the cost of doing it--is virtually immediate. When, for example, the ship's surgeon officially confirms that Claggart is dead, Vere, with no hint of pre-emptive judgement ~~but,~~ rather, out of quick intuitive grasp of the situation, exclaims that Claggart has been "struck dead by an angel of God! Yet the angel must hang!"(101) The tension, instead, is most intensely apparent in the uncertainty, given Vere's decisiveness, over whether or not the order on board ship can survive the execution of Budd, for if the risk to order is great if Vere defers action, it is as great, if not greater, if the law were to be applied.

Nevertheless, Vere is able to keep the situation under control with what amounts to a triumph of sensitive tact, itself the necessary accompaniment of a reverent openness to the facts of the situation. Vere emerges, indeed, as a man who *is* susceptible to those influences which would deflect morality and who honestly and candidly acknowledges their presence and power. This is to say that he is a living embodiment of a central intelligence which apprehends--to echo Melville's own praise of Hawthorne again--"the absolute condition of present things" but more particularly "as they strike the eye of the man who fears them not, though they do their worst to him, . . ."

Under ordinary circumstances, one could let such a general account rest with the ordinary expectation of more specific support to follow, but, unfortunately, one must first make note of the extraordinary and rather puzzling disagreement over what happens in the story and why it has developed over the last generation of critics. The dispute centers on what Melville's judgement is on the propriety of Vere's actions and the different positions that have emerged could not be more cleanly opposed.[8] On the one hand, there is the view that Melville's last story is his final "testament of acceptance" or, alternatively, a final "recognition of necessity"--an old man's dignified gesture of "quiet conservatism" which is brought to life and confirmed by the actions of Vere in his following through with the execution of Billy Budd. There is much in the account of the action that I have given which confirms and, indeed, draws upon the many different versions of this position. On the other hand, there is the more recent view that Melville, far from expressing a quiet conservatism, is, in fact, ironically condemning this position. The so-called "ironists" claim to share with Melville outrage and revulsion over the execution of Budd and that his purpose is to expose Vere, with his concern for applying the letter of the law and his belief in the efficacy of "measured forms," as a shallow formalist. This latter view is certainly quite wrong, a fact which, however, has not prevented it from becoming the prevailing view. And because of its persistent appeal and considerable influence--it is now impossible to read and discuss *Billy Budd* without acknowledging this--the ironists cannot be dismissed, if only for this reason.

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[8] The literature that has grown out of this dispute is enormous and continues to proliferate. The most detailed and useful summaries of the different arguments on either side can be found in H. Bruce Franklin, "From Empire to Empire: *Billy Budd, Sailor*," *Herman Melville: Reassessments*, ed. A. Robert Lee (London: Vision Press, 1984), pp. 199-216, and Thomas Scorza, *In the Time Before Steamships* (De Kalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1979).

The very fact that the disagreement over the story is so polarized and, consequently, so intense, serves as a kind of provocation for us to seek a way of reconciling such radically opposed positions. And if we are provoked, we find, I think, that the disagreement is not so futile as it might seem and that it, in fact, has some suggestive value. We are not to find this reconciliation in the simple judgement that the story is ambiguous--even with the precedent of *Pierre*--nor are we to take this a step further by viewing the story, as the deconstructionists would be bound to do, as a null set, although the intensity and persistence of the disagreement could easily be cited in support of this. Rather, the disagreement calls attention to itself as indicative, however crudely, of the extreme demands that Melville's reverent honesty--a disposition for "truth uncompromisingly told"--makes upon our ordinary and stable respect for public authority and the rule of law. Put another way, it is a reflection of how difficult it is to countenance intellectual honesty, let alone detect it. As Allan Tate has observed of some writers--and we almost certainly think of Melville in this way: "We have got to take them as they come, and sometimes they come a little rough."

There isn't any doubt that the so-called "testament of acceptance" critics do a better job than the ironists of taking Melville as he comes in *Billy Budd*. However, even with this in mind, one must say that there is an essential roughness to *Billy Budd* that these critics do not quite have a grip on. There is much talk of calm acceptance of and submission to authority, but this is a response that verges on sentimentality because it is rather too easily and eagerly given, with the sacrifice involved rather too readily slighted and obscured.

Our perception of this is certainly sharpened, if not motivated, by the stridency of the ironist's reaction to this view. For if the ironists are guilty of obliterating Melville's conviction of the rightness of Vere's actions, one, nevertheless, feels that there is something understandable, if finally sentimental, about, for example, the shrillness of Joseph Schiffman's classic statement of the ironist position, a shrillness which reaches its highest pitch in his discussion of the crucial events leading up to and including the execution of Budd: 'God Bless Captain Vere!' Is not this piercing irony? As innocent Billy utters these words does not the reader gag? The injustice of Billy's hanging is heightened by his ironic blessing of the ironic Vere.''[''] We do not, of course, gag and we can feel no piercing irony. But such a response is one kind of measure of the strength of feeling aroused by the action and of the depth of Melville's involvement with it. The sense of outrage here is, in fact, something which Melville comes very close to inducing and one should not be overly surprised that Schiffman and many others have been overpowered by this to the point where they could actually feel free to dismiss claims about Melville's "quiet conservatism" as preposterous.

Indeed, so rough does *Billy Budd* come--so thoroughly does it traduce the natural and deeply rooted feeling one might say is bred into the bone of American life--that for many there could be no alternative but to regard it as a work of irony. Melville appears to take a position that is so outrageous that no reasonable man could hold it seriously--certainly no American could, certainly not a man like Melville, himself a son of the Revolution, the grandson of the Hero of Bunker Hill, and the author of *White-Jacket* --and who, accordingly, signals his ironic intentions as surely as does Swift in "A Modest Proposal." Without such a passionately motivated and now hardened assumption on the part of the ironists, how else could one explain their energetic and quite innocent appropriation and misconstruction of the most minute details of the story?

[''] Joseph Schiffman, "Melville's Final Stage, Irony: A Re-Examination of *Billy Budd* Criticism," *American Literature*, 22 (1950), 133.

There is, for example, a kind of passionate obliviousness to the most rudimentary standards of evidence and inference in Bruce Franklin's very recent observations on the story, in which he seems incapable of distinguishing the absurd point from the obvious one:

> The core of Vere's argument [to the drumhead court] is that 'Nature', 'the heart', and 'the conscience' must all be subordinated to the particular order embodied by the British King and the British Empire. This is the king and empire from which America had just won its freedom.

In addition, he says, drawing on an article by an equally oblivious Stanton Garner:

> This very king was a notorious madman. Vere's own argument inadvertently recalls that one of George III's most famous symptoms of insanity was his obsession with making buttons, giving him the sobriquet of 'The Button Maker': 'But do these buttons that we wear attest that our allegiance is to Nature? No, to the King.''[108]

And so on.

The point, however, is that the story pulls us in both directions in a way that neither the "testament" critics nor the ironists can adequately perceive. Taken together they suggest but obscure the fact that Melville has found the unstable but better-centered ground between the sentimental extremes of complacency and indignation. There is nothing neutral about this position and the attitude it implies. For it is the accompaniment of the way Melville maintains an evaluative and discriminating distance from the disruptive and attractive emotional pressures aroused by the action and yet maintains a truly tactful and sympathetic contact with them. This, in turn, is motivated by (and is our evidence for) what can only be called a reverent care for fact, the vulnerable equipoise of sympathetic identification and judgement which gives one access to the "absolute condition of present things." If this requires great honesty of mind, Melville, in *Billy Budd*, makes us aware of how, by implication, it requires a commensurate courage and that perception itself is grounded in it.

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[108] Franklin, p. 205. See Stanton Garner, "Fraud as Fact in Herman Melville's *Billy Budd, San Jose Review*, 4 (1978), 98.

We only need to turn to Melville's presentation of Vere during the execution scene to see how Melville brings to life this kind of attention and to see how far removed it is from an old man's "quiet conservatism" or, alternatively, an assertion of ironic distance. To go back to a passage that Schiffman has found so significant:

> Billy stood facing aft. At the penultimate moment, his words, his only ones, words wholly unobstructed in the utterance, were these: 'God Bless Captain Vere!' Syllables unanticipated coming from one with the ignominious hemp about his neck--a conventional felon's benediction directed aft towards the quarters of honor;...

And then,

> Without volition, as it were, as if indeed the ship's populace were but the vehicles of some vocal current electric, with one voice from alow and aloft came a resonant sympathetic echo: 'God Bless Captan Vere!' And yet at that instant Billy alone must have been in their hearts, even as in their eyes.

> At the pronounced words and the spontaneous echo that voluminously rebounded them, Captain Vere, either through stoic self-control or a sort of momentary paralysis induced by emotional shock, stood erectly rigid as a musket in the ship-armorer's rack.(123-24)

Here is the just response to the necessary slaughter of a profoundly innocent man who, with perfect equanimity and selflessness, which, if not strictly courageous, is nevertheless pure and trusting, surrenders his own life in strict accordance to the law. This response is rendered in terms of a dramatic gesture. Vere is standing at attention, which is, of course, the gesture appropriate to the occasion of a public execution. But it is more than a matter of mere military decorum, for a formal gesture is transformed into a means of controlling and directing strong emotion and, accordingly, resonates with it. The fact that Vere stands "erectly rigid as a musket in a ship armorer's rack" makes clear that the precise means is a spontaneous muscular response--a stiffening of the entire body in resistance to the opposing and almost overwhelming pressure of spontaneously sympathetic feeling aroused by the poignancy of Budd's benediction. If Melville shows deliberate restraint in his commentary in determining whether or not Vere's rigidity is the correlative of a controlled preemption of feeling, it is because the alternative--"a momentary paralysis induced by emotional shock"--is too difficult to distinguish from the other. For if shock involves the sudden collision of equally strong yet opposing and unreconciled allegiances--induced in this case by Billy's benediction--self-control, in order for it to be possible here, would require facing and recovering from the same sort of collision. We have reached the point of maximum stress where, as Melville suggests, control, if there is control, verges on the shocked limit of feeling itself. The difference then between shock and control here is a difference of degree--a slight difference indeed since each is naturally resolved into the same gesture of standing erectly rigid. Vere's gesture, as such, is the appropriate register of his leaving his allegiance to duty and the "measured forms" which give it form and activity open to the full force of the greatest of all possible challenges to their moral authority. It represents, on Vere's part, the honest and courageous apprehension of the reality and legitimacy of both sides of the issue along with the will to hold them together before him without allowing his commitment to the one to distort or misrepresent--and thus undercut--the sympathetic attention due to the other. But, finally, Vere's gesture is, for these reasons, the embodiment of a quality of attention to fact which is ultimately tragic. For the very reason that Vere is susceptible to the just sympathy that Budd's case demands, he can only evaluate it and assert his allegiance to duty by tightening his official posture--a flex of his whole being--to the point where he presents himself as and holds to all that he can be under the circumstances. That is, he, through a kind of self-annihilation involving the abandonment of all selfish attitudes, becomes an unyielding and impersonal instrument of war, of pure Force in the defense of civilized order, as the figure of the musket in the ship armorer's rack dictates.

So much then for quiet conservatism or irony. But the important point that emerges here, one that I have been trying to head towards for some time, is that we can only arrive at this final perception of the significance of the action in *Billy Budd* by reaching down to specific details of language. But more than this. It also involves noting how they, considered together with other details in the surrounding context of the whole story, grow into and connect up with what we eventually and emergently perceive as a style. And to repeat and insist upon an earlier point, a style is a principle of selection; of, that is, particular selections of words, of particular ways of putting them together into sentences, of ways of ordering and connecting sentences into larger units of structure and, finally, of ways of disposing these larger units so that they fill out and ultimately define the trajectory of the whole action. This is not a particularly controversial point, but there is enough to suggest in the passage I have just discussed that the principle of selection--and the quality of intelligence motivating it--is that of gentlemanly and, hence, reverential care for accuracy and truth, the same kind of care that we have learned to recognize in Hawthorne's style.

I have in mind, in particular, Melville's gesture of forbearance concerning Vere's state of mind at the critical moment before Budd is executed, which, with its careful balance of inclusion and exclusion, realizes so aptly the extreme feeling of the moment. Indeed, this same care permeates the entire passage but it is only possible here to assert this claim and to add that the degree of concentration I have already implicitly attributed to the passage is *there* and is, in turn inseparable from this care. Support for this will have to wait upon the painstaking process of taking Melville as he comes in the story. This, in turn, is a matter of discovering how particular details of language crystallize into the reverential care that permeates the whole tale. It is prose in which we feel that almost every detail along with the particular conditions of their arrangement and the process by which they accumulate into a broader movement is animated by the reverent care and the tension it accommodates--the tension, indeed, as I have suggested, which is evident in the action as a whole.

VII. The Form and Style of *Billy Budd*

Billy Budd is a story told with gentlemanly care. This means that Melville presents himself as one whose impersonal concern for accuracy and truth is motivated and guided by a loving openness and discriminating fear. This reverential attention to fact, as a wondering, submissive and original contact with experience and the significance and value bound up in it, is, as Melville understood, the antithesis of the preconceived and pre-emptive. It is, rather, as we have seen Hawthorne striving for, a quality of intelligence given over to and taking the form of the action of seeking and not finding yet.

The particular movement and order of prose engendered by this care is evident at the very beginning of the tale as Melville introduces us to the character of Billy Budd by way of some preparatory remarks on the Handsome Sailor:

> In the time before steamships, or then more frequently than now, a stroller along the docks of any considerable seaport would occasionally have his attention arrested by a group of bronzed mariners, man-of-war's men or merchant sailors in holiday attire, ashore on liberty. In certain instances they would flank, or like a bodyguard quite surround, some superior figure of their own class, moving along with them like Aldebaran among the lesser lights of his constellation. That signal object was the 'Handsome Sailor' of the less prosaic time alike of the military and merchant navies. With no perceptible trace of the vainglorious about him, rather with the offhand unaffectedness of natural regality, he seemed to accept the spontaneous homage of his shipmates. (43)

But then, characteristically, Melville interrupts the forward movement of his discussion with an impromptu restatement and refinement of this opening paragraph as he focusses on a particular example:

> A somewhat remarkable instance recurs to me. In Liverpool, now half a century ago, I saw under the shadow of the great dingy street-wall of Prince's Dock (an obstruction long since removed) a common sailor so intensely black that he must needs have been a native African of the unadulterate blood of Ham--a symmetric figure much above average height. The two ends of a gay silk handkerchief thrown loose about the neck danced upon the displayed ebony of his chest, in his ears were big hoops of gold, and a Highland bonnet with a tartan band set off his shapely head. It was a hot noon in July; and his face, lustrous with perspiration, beamed with barbaric good humor. In jovial sallies right and left, his white teeth flashing into view, he rollicked along, the center of a company of his shipmates. These were made up of such an assortment of tribes and complexions as would have well fitted them to be marched up by Anacharsis Cloots before the bar of the first French Assembly as Representatives of the Human Race. At each spontaneous tribute rendered by the wayfarers to this black pagod of a fellow--the tribute of a pause and a stare, and less frequently an exclamation--the motley retinue showed that they took that sort of pride in the evoker of it which the Assyrian priests doubtless showed for their grand sculptured Bull when the faithful prostrated themselves. (43-4)

The first paragraph is a general description of the Handsome Sailor's natural regality and the spontaneous homage his aspect inspires. The second paragraph is not so much an illustration of this as it is, indeed, a digressive reworking of the first, prompted initially by an associative and spontaneous reflex of memory. This reflex is evident in the very abruptness of the transition between the two paragraphs--"A remarkable instance recurs to me"--following hard as it does upon the ample and nicely rounded period which wraps up the previous paragraph. Melville then goes on to describe this remarkable instance but, in doing so, brings forward and repeats the order of the previous paragraph to accommodate the lingering and involved attention that this instance justly commands.

One becomes aware that Melville's purpose in this impromptu restatement is to move towards a greater accuracy of detail but also--in what is an inseparable concern--a greater accuracy of feeling than was originally available to him in the first paragraph. That he achieves this accuracy is evident in the way he hovers over the aspect of the Handsome Sailor in the second paragraph:

> The two ends of a gay silk handkerchief thrown loose about the neck danced upon the displayed ebony of his chest, in his ears were big hoops of gold, and a Highland bonnet with a tartan band set off his shapely head. It was a hot noon in July; and his face, lustrous with perspiration, beamed with barbaric good humor. In jovial sallies right and left, his white teeth flashing into view, he rollicked along, the center of a company of his shipmates.

Here again is the offhand unaffectedness of natural regality but rendered in splendid detail. But in addition to this there is a wondering admiration in this recitation which is evident not only in the sheer plenitude of detail but also in the noticeably, but not disruptively, quickened pace of the style at this point in the passage. It fits into, just as it helps define our overall sense that the second paragraph as a whole offers a kind of spontaneous homage that is not merely stated but enacted. In turn, this implies the immediacy of personal contact which is a necessary part of acknowledging and apprehending what the Handsome Sailor essentially is. But, taking the two paragraphs together, we see that this sense of final precision in conception and feeling is the fruit of a process of exploratory and tactful approach. It accords with our sense that the perception of moral character itself is a process which demands a commensurate flexibility and capacity of style necessary to accommodate and to record this process. And having taken this impromptu step and having exhausted the feeling behind it, Melville then abruptly returns to the main line of his general discussion of the Handsome Sailor--as abruptly as he departed from it--with the sharply stated "To return" at the beginning of the next paragraph.[101]

All of this, we should keep in mind, is a necessary preparation for Melville's treatment of Billy Budd and we see that Melville extends the same kind of tactful and exploratory attention towards him. From the moment Budd is introduced to us, we see how this kind of attention resists concocted and premeditated expression:

> Such a cynosure, at least in aspect, and something too in nature, though with important variations made apparent as the story proceeds, was welkin-eyed Billy Budd--or Baby Budd, as more familiarly, under circumstances hereafter to be given, he at last came

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[101] See Hayford and Sealts, pp. 243, 281-283. They show that the digressive paragraph on the Negro sailor was composed at a later stage of composition and inserted between the opening paragraph and the paragraph which resumes the main discussion. The transitional phrase, "To return," was the product as well of a later pencil revision. This kind of substantive revision is, as Hayford and Sealts reveal, typical of Melville's habits of composition--the result itself of a spontaneous and impromptu afterthought.

> to be called--aged twenty-one, a foretopman of the British fleet toward the close of the last decade of the eighteenth century.(44)

The movement of this sentence, like the broader movement from paragraph to paragraph discussed above, demonstrates the flexible accommodation of impromptu qualification.[102] It is as if the very perception of the similarities between the Handsome Sailor and Budd on Melville's part--as asserted by the main clause, "Such a cynosure. . .was welkin-eyed Billy Budd. . . ."--gives rise to the instantaneous and parenthetically recorded perception of differences. Melville then carefully proceeds to develop a more specific sense of both the differences but ~~in~~ such a way as to reflect the sense of process evident in this preparatory statement. We will see that the similarities and differences are constantly held together before our attention and are evolved simultaneously in a way that accords with the process of gathering in and reflecting upon the details of character as they gradually emerge from the action, while the sense and integrity of the living and moving image of the man who embodies each is carefully preserved. We will, that is, see how Melville sensitively exercises the virtue of reverence.

Our first impression of Budd comes at the moment of his impressment where we are initially alerted to an as yet undeveloped sense of the similarities and differences that grow out of a comparison with the Handsome Sailor:

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[102] See Hayford and Sealts, p. 284. The original version of this passage makes more explicit Melville's intention to "evolve" the character of Billy Budd: "Such a cynosure, at least in aspect, and something such too in his nature, though with very important variations that will evolve themselves as the story proceeds, was welkin-eyed Billy Budd, . . ."

> Plump upon Billy at first sight in the gangway the boarding officer, Lieutenant Ratcliffe, pounced, even before the merchantman's crew was formally mustered on the quarter-deck for his deliberate inspection. And him only he elected. For whether it was because the other men were ranged before him showed to ill advantage after Billy, or whether he had some scruples in view of the merchantman's being rather short-handed, however it might be, the officer contented himself with his first spontaneous choice. To the surprise of the ship's company, though much to the lieutenant's satisfaction, Billy made no demur. But, indeed, any demur would have been as idle as the protest of a goldfinch popped into a cage. (45)

That Budd is, on the one hand, such a cynosure is, of course, suggested, but not immediately confirmed, by the response of Lieutenant Ratcliffe as he boards *The Rights of Man*. The note of gentlemanly forbearance ("Whether it was because. . .or whether he had some scruples. . . .") is an appropriate gesture since it is, indeed, impossible at this stage of the narrative to choose between these alternatives--until, that is, we see more of Budd. On the other hand, Budd's response to his predicament is noteworthy. Indeed, not only does Budd not make any demur but, as Melville points out, his "uncomplaining acquiescence" to his arbitrary impressment is "all but cheerful" which, in turn, earns "a surprised glance of silent reproach" from Captain Graveling, the master of the *Rights of Man*. It is not premature to characterize Budd's response as indicative of a difference, for we have Melville's description of the

Handsome Sailor behind us to guide our judgement. "Ashore," he notes, "he was the champion; afloat the spokesman." And Budd, of course, simply fails to stand out in this way, unlike, for example, Melville's other Handsome Sailors such as Jack Chase in *White-Jacket* and Steelkilt in *Moby-Dick*. Nevertheless, we are not yet in a position to assess the significance of this difference nor can we precisely evaluate the relevance that Melville's notation of Budd's sobriquet ("Baby Budd") would have in the matter, except that it awakens our general awareness that the sense of immaturity suggested by the name is consistent with diffidence. But any attempt to force a conclusion here would be premature. Again, we must wait upon Budd, and this is a discipline that Melville imposes upon himself. It is nothing else but the discipline of gentlemanly forbearance.

However, even though, as I have said and as the passage I have quoted confirms, the similarities and differences between Budd and the Handsome Sailor emerge simultaneously or, at least, in the mutually defining company of each other, it is necessary, for the purposes of analysis, to separate them and discuss each in turn. I will begin with how Melville develops the similarities.

Going back to Melville's note of cautious forbearance concerning Lieutenant Ratcliffe's motives in contenting himself with his first spontaneous choice, we find that, shortly, after the matter becomes less uncertain as Captain Graveling plays host to Ratcliffe. There is no evidence that

Ratcliffe has any scruples about the apparent short-handedness of the *Rights*, but there is every indication of why Ratcliffe is more than satisfied with his choice. We hear Graveling grieve over the loss of his best man, "the jewel of 'em", a characterization to which Ratcliffe quickly and readily assents. Moreover, Graveling describes him as his "peacemaker" and says that the men "took to him like hornets to treacle" and have a great, almost worshipful esteem for him. And he goes on to relate the story of the swift justice Budd serves to Red Whiskers, who maliciously and enviously provokes him but who, in his turn, comes to love Billy along with the rest of the men.

But our evolving impression of Budd and sense of the appropriateness of the comparison to the Handsome Sailor reaches a more conclusive stage of development as Melville then follows Budd from his, as Melville puts it, "former and simpler sphere to the ampler and more knowing world of a great warship."(50) Once Billy is on board the *Bellipotent*, Melville begins to pay more direct and exclusive attention to him. Observing him closely, Melville notes, among other things, the favorable effect his aspect has on some of the officers--"the more intelligent men of the quarter-deck" --and a clear reason can be offered for this, one which, in turn, gives further illumination of the reasons behind Ratcliffe's spontaneous choice:

> Cast in a mold peculiar to the finest physical examples of those Englishmen in whom the Saxon strain would seem not at all to partake of any Norman or

> other admixture, he showed in face that humane look of reposeful good nature which the Greek sculptor in some instances gave to his heroic strong man, Hercules.(51)

And moving closer still:

> But this again was subtly modified by another and pervasive quality. The ear, small and shapely, the arch of the foot, the curve of the mouth and nostril, even the indurated hand telling alike of the halyards and the tar bucket; but, above all, something in the mobile expression, and every attitude and movement, something suggestive of a mother eminently favored by Love and the Graces; all this strangely indicated a lineage in direct contradiction to his lot.

With this latter development and refinement, we indeed, feel that Budd has finally and certainly emerged as a remarkable instance of the Handsome Sailor. Although Melville's controlling purpose in this sentence is to define this other and pervasive quality and to draw some conclusion about what it indicates of Budd, he cannot do so without acknowledging and paying submissive attention to Budd's arresting figure. There is, as we have seen before in Melville's opening remarks about the Handsome Sailor, that quick-paced articulation of massively accumulating detail which is suggestive of lingering and excited admiration--a response which, on the whole, is more satisfyingly rich and more squarely on the mark than the simpler and cruder "tribute of a pause and a stare, and less frequently an exclamation."

But a quality evident here which is not present in the earlier description of the Handsome Sailor is the clear sense that the details and the motivating feeling that calls them forth vigorously challenge, and almost overwhelm, the controlled effort of thought Melville maintains in this sentence. The detail accumulates to the point where the forward movement of the sentence is almost completely disrupted. In addition, although the sheer accumulation is primarily responsible for this disruption, it is enhanced by the scattered order in which the details come to our attention, as if to suggest a momentary slackening of concentration, a sense of getting lost in the details, for the lack of a better phrase. We move in a series of quick glances from the ear down to the foot, back to the mouth and nostril and then down to the hand, a movement which is directed by the simple process of noting and dwelling upon isolated instances of striking detail in the order in which they strike the mind of the observer. So, even though these details gradually emerge as evidence for the claim that completes the sentence and reestablishes its forward movement ("all of this strangely indicated"), the sentence nevertheless enacts in its very movement the suspensive pressure of spontaneous admiration that is implicit in the various responses to Budd noted so far on the part of the other characters. It represents the adequate stylistic response to, just as it is the means of discovering, what Billy Budd essentially *is*.

To this end, however, it should be added that Melville does not permit the similarities between Budd and the Handsome Sailor to crowd out the equally evident and highly relevant differences which emerge from this comparison. As noted before, the precise character of these differences is not immediately evident; we initially notice Budd's surprising diffidence, his "uncomplaining acquiescence" in the face of his arbitrary impressment at the hands of Lieutenant Ratcliffe. It is an un-Handsome Sailor-like quality to be sure, but as we see more of Budd in action, this initial impression of difference is carefully built upon and evolved to the point where we find that mere difference takes on the significance and specificity of profoundly crucial limitations. For we discover that implicit in Budd's diffidence is the fact of his remarkably touching yet disabling innocence.

The process of making this discovery, of course, takes us beyond the first two chapters of the tale, to which I have so far confined myself as a means of initially getting a grip on the reverent motives of Melville's style. But just as we see Melville's gentlemanly care enacted in these early chapters on a relatively minute scale, so is it reflected in the particular disposition and arrangement of the larger units of structure as well--in, that is, the order of the chapters themselves and in the principles that account for the progression from chapter to chapter. We detect the presence of this directing care most clearly in the freedom and frequency with which Melville, in moving from chapter to chapter, interrupts the forward movement of his narrative with digressive stretches of expository analysis and reflection prompted by the action itself.

A relevant instance of this broader movement, as far as the unfolding of Budd's character is concerned, appears in the stretch of the story that begins with chapter 14 and extends to chapter 18. In chapter 14, Melville narrates the incident in which Squeek, Claggart's henchman, attempts to lure Budd into a mutinous conspiracy. This is followed, in chapter 15, with an account of how completely puzzled Billy is by this incident; he, after all, has had no previous contact with the afterguardsman but, more important still, it was an entirely new experience, the first time in his life that he had ever been approached in an underhanded intriguing fashion."(83) His bewilderment is aggravated by his amazement with the Dansker's confident and laconic observation that Claggart is behind it all. Then, in chapters 16 and 17, Melville suspends his narrative in order to dwell upon Billy's inability to grasp the possibility that Claggart is, as the Dansker says, "down on him," and from this point proceeds to seek an adequate explanation for it. Then, having exhausted this impulse, Melville resumes the narrative in chapter 18 with the abruptly redirective transitional statement: "After the mysterious interview in the forechains, the one so abruptly ended by Billy, nothing especially germane to the story occurred until the events now to be narrated"(90)--from which point Melville goes on to describe how Claggart goes to the Captain in order to accuse Budd of mutinous conspiracy.[7]

The similarity between this broader movement and what has already been observed of the style on a more minute level should be a little more clear now. The abrupt and impromptu shifting back and forth between action and commentary that we see here suggests both the movement of the interpretive exertions of the mind coming into closer and closer contact with its subject. Not surprisingly, this is the same kind of movement which grows out of and shapes itself around the particular exigencies involved in the adequate apprehension of Claggart and Vere, both of whom, in their distinct ways, are exceptional figures along with Budd.

The manner in which Claggart and Vere are first introduced is of further relevance in determining the character of this broad movement. Melville's initial sketch of these two men (Melville introduces Vere first in chapters 6 and 7 and then follows with Claggart in chapter 8) forms a part of a loosely connected sequence of digressive chapters which buds out from the narration of Billy's impressment. Indeed, taken all together, they constitute a massive disruption and suspension of the narrative, which Melville begins with the impressment scene but does not properly resume again until chapter 9 with the account of the trouble Billy begins to find himself in over his bag and hammock and his subsequent encounter with the Dansker. Still, this digressive sequence, in effect, a large scale parenthesis, is an appropriate and relevant extension of the process of seeking and not finding yet, a process which we also detect in the particular order of the chapters which make up this sequence.

The principle of development from chapter to chapter is associative. After giving an account of Budd's impressment in chapter 1, and after making some additional observations of Budd's character in chapter 2, Melville moves to a discussion, in chapter 3, of the Spithead and Nore Mutinies, which occurred in the spring of 1797, a few months before the events on board the *Bellipotent* take place. But if this chapter disrupts the narration, it is also a natural development. It grows out of the very fact that it is a matter of historical record (and Melville alludes to this in chapter 5) that impressment was a primary source of discontent among the mutineers. But also, it is here where Melville emphasizes the grave danger these mutinies posed to national security during a time of war--to, indeed, "the sole free conservative [power] of the Old World:"

> ...the bluejackets, to be numbered by thousands, ran up with huzzas the British colors with the union and the cross wiped out; by that cancellation transmuting the flag of founded law and freedom defined, into the enemy's red meteor of unbridled and unbounded revolt. Reasonable discontent growing out of practical grievances in the fleet had been ignited into irrational combustion as by live cinders blown across the Channel from France in flames. (54)

This observation picks up on Lieutenant Ratcliffe's stern rebuke of Billy's unironic "And good-bye to you too, old *Rights of Man*" which, even though it inspires a repressed smile on Ratcliffe's part--he perceives it as an unironic remark, of course--it nevertheless requires him to "instantly assume all the rigor of his rank", a vigorous and necessary formal response to a "terrible breach of naval decorum" at a time when the Mutinies are fresh in everyone's memory.

But as Melville draws this chapter to a conclusion, he provides the jumping off point for the next chapter. He goes on to point out in chapter 3 that the Mutinies were finally suppressed thanks mainly to the unswerving loyalty of the marines and a "voluntary resumption of loyalty among influential sections of the crews."(55) Moreover, as the situation returns to normal, the many thousands of mutineers themselves proved to be

> some of the tars who not so very long ago afterwards--whether wholly prompted thereto by patriotism, or pugnacious instinct, or by both--helped to win a coronet for Nelson at the Nile, and the naval crown of crowns for him at Trafalgar. To the mutineers, those battles and especially Trafalgar were a plenary absolution and a grand one. For all that goes to make up the scenic naval display and heroic magnificence in arms, those battles, especially Trafalgar, stand unmatched in human annals. (55-56)

Then, after having landed here with a reference to Nelson, Melville associatively proceeds to develop a portrait of Nelson himself in chapter 4. Here, Melville is primarily concerned with defining that special quality of Nelson's heroism which is implicit in the concluding observation of chapter 3--and defending it against the "martial utilitarians" and the "Benthamites of war," who would be quick to point out, as Melville anticipates their argument, that Nelson's death on the quarter-deck of the *Victory* was the predictable result of his "ornate publication of his person in battle" which was "not only unnecessary but. . . savored of foolhardiness and vanity." To this Melville responds that "few commanders have been so painstakingly circumspect as this same reckless declarer of his person in fight." And further still:

> Personal prudence, even when dictated by quite other than selfish considerations, surely is no special virtue in a military man; while an excessive love of glory, impassioning a less burning impulse, the honest sense of duty, is the first. If the name *Wellington* is not so much a trumpet of the blood as the simpler name *Nelson*, the reason for this may perhaps be inferred from above. Alfred in his funeral ode on the victor of Waterloo ventures not to call him the greatest soldier of all time, though in the same ode he invokes Nelson as 'the greatest sailor since our world began.'(58)

Melville, however, is not finished with either the mutinies or Nelson, as he, in chapter 5, draws these two threads together and develops them further. Initially and abruptly, he picks up the discussion of the Nore Mutiny from where he broke it off at the end of chapter 3; the outbreak at the Nore was, he reiterates, put down. But, as he observes here, not every grievance was redressed--certainly not impressment, because "its abrogation would have crippled the indispensable fleet. . . a fleet more insatiate in demand for men, because then multiplying its ships of all grades against contingencies present and to come of the convulsed Continent."(59) The situation, indeed, remained potentially explosive and the fear of a future outbreak was quite legitimate. And, as Melville makes clear, Nelson's heroic presence, the very fact that he is "a trumpet to the blood", especially suits him as an instrument of order in the aftermath of the crisis:

> In the same year with this story, Nelson, then Rear Admiral Sir Horatio, being with the fleet off the Spanish coast, was directed by the admiral in command to shift his pennant from the *Captain* to the *Theseus*; and for this reason: that the latter ship having newly arrived on the station from home, where it had taken part in the Great Mutiny, danger was apprehended from the temper of the men; and it was thought that an officer like Nelson was the one, not indeed to terrorize the crew into base subjection, but to win them, by force of his mere presence and heroic personality, back to an allegiance if not as enthusiastic as his own yet as true.(59)

From this point Melville then proceeds to chapter 6--the situation in the Navy calls forth the situation on board the *Bellipotent* as Melville works his way back to the particular circumstances of the tale:

> But on board the seventy-four in which Billy now swung his hammock, very little in the manner of the men and nothing obvious in the demeanor of the officers would have suggested to an ordinary observer that the Great Mutiny was a recent event.(59-60)

And in a similar way, Nelson, the commander of the *Victory*, calls forth Vere, the commander of the *Bellipotent*:

> In their general bearing and conduct the commissioned officers of the warship naturally take their tone from the commander, that is if he has the ascendancy of character that ought to be his.
>
> Captain the Honorable Edward Fairfax Vere, to give his full title, was a bachelor of forty or thereabouts, a sailor of distinction even in a time prolific of renowned seamen.(60)

And after another short chapter which develops the sketch of Vere introduced in chapter 6, Melville moves fairly directly--he dismisses the necessity of discussing the lieutenants, the other commissioned officers and warrant officers,of, that is, introducing a kind of list of contingents--to Claggart in chapter 8. Then, at this point, the sequence finally exhausts itself, as Melville leads us back into the action of the story at the moment where, appropriately enough, Claggart's involvement with Billy is first apparent.

This loose agglomeration of digressive chapters is thus a form of seeking and not finding yet. One, indeed, feels that the sequence as a whole enacts the process of gathering in material or, rather, of allowing it to accumulate and cluster together--material, the relevance and significance of which is *not yet* precisely determinable or entirely clear but which nevertheless asserts a kind of resonant presence over the rest of the story. The sequence as such serves as a kind of fund of associated material which grows naturally out of the action and which is held suspended before one's attention to be made use of--this is putting it crudely--to be, in some way, activated and implicated, elsewhere in the story. Just as it is an outgrowth of the action, it also, thus, plays a crucial role for Melville in directing the process of unfolding the significance of the different characters and events.

We have seen, to take an isolated example, how the chapters on Vere grow spontaneously and irresistibly out of the preceding discussion of the mutinies and how they are the means by which Melville progresses to his discussion of Vere. But in addition to this, Nelson also stands out not only as a standard of heroic conduct in general but as a means to discover Vere's character by way of the differences and similarities that emerge from Vere's natural association with him. We judge, for example, the quality of Vere's sense of duty and self-sacrifice within the resonant context provided by Nelson, just as we, within the same context, notice Vere's contrasting lack of "brilliant qualities." I shall have more to say about Vere in the next chapter--but so far we can see that Vere's relationship to Nelson corresponds with Billy's relationship to the Handsome Sailor, although the connection between Vere and Nelson is not explicitly made. There is an unmistakable yet similarly unforced association between Nelson and Billy as well. The observation that Nelson won over the men on board the *Theseus* "by force of his mere presence and heroic personality" and that he is a "trumpet to the blood" (is there something of the Handsome Sailor in Nelson?) reaches back to Captain Graveling's remarks about Billy's role as a "peacemaker":

> 'Before I shipped that young fellow, my forecastle was a rat-pit of quarrels....But Billy came; and it was like a Catholic priest striking peace in an Irish shindy. Not that he preached to them or said or did anything in particular; but a virtue went out of him, sugaring the sour ones.'(46-47)

And it also reaches forward to the execution scene, for in a similar way Billy strikes peace among a crew on the verge of mutinous riot with his benediction "God bless Captain Vere!" It had, as Melville notes, "a phenomenal effect, not unenhanced by the rare personal beauty of the young sailor, spiritualized now through late experiences so poignantly profound". Indeed,

> Without volition, as it were, as if indeed the ship's populace were but the vehicles of some vocal current electric, with one voice from alow and aloft came a resonant sympathetic echo: 'God Bless Captain Vere!' And yet at that instant Billy alone must have been in their hearts, even as in their eyes.(123)

Here, Vere's Nelson-like sense of duty co-operates with Billy's Nelson-like ability to move the men to acquiesce to his own execution--the two separate qualities splitting off from their exemplar and embodied separately yet, again, co-operatively, in Vere and Budd at the critical moment in the action of the story.

We are now in a position to take a further step back from the tale and note what kind of effect Melville's freedom of intervention has on the structure as a whole.

Indeed, out of a total of 30 chapters (as determined by Hayford and Sealts) only 14 are devoted to the raw narrative of events, but even here it cannot be said that they are exclusively devoted to this. These include chapters 1, 9, 14, 15, and 18-27 (a sequence which begins with Claggart's approach to Vere on the quarter-deck to inform on Billy, after which the descent to the climax of the story and its aftermath moves without interruption, with the crucially timed exception of chapter 25). The rest, of course, consists of the loosely connected stretches of expository digression which we can now see as a primary means, on Melville's part, of expanding the capacity of his style--and here it is unnecessary if not impossible to distinguish it from structure--of shaping it, that is, according to the practical requirements of maintaining an exploratory contact with his subject.

That this is his controlling purpose, Melville states often enough. There is the insincere apology of his introduction to his first chapter on Nelson, for example:

> In this manner of writing, resolve as one may to keep to the main road, some bypaths have an enticement not readily to be withstood. I am going to err into such a bypath. If the reader will keep me company I shall be glad. At the least, we can promise ourselves that pleasure which is wickedly said to be in sinning, for a literary sin the divergence will be. (56)

Or, more directly to the point, this time at the conclusion to chapter 11:

> The point of the present story turning on the hidden nature of the master-at-arms has necessitated this chapter. With an added hint or two in connection with the incident at the mess, the resumed narrative must be left to vindicate, as it may, its own credibility. (76-77)

But, finally, in the most direct and inclusive statement of all, one that governs the previous two statements, Melville notes, as he introduces the final three chapters which make up the conclusion to the story:

> The symmetry of form attainable in pure fiction cannot be so readily achieved in a narration essentially having less to do with fable than with fact. Truth uncompromisingly told will always have its ragged edges; hence the conclusion of such narration is apt to be less finished than an architectural finial. (128)

This is certainly an apt characterization of not only the broader movement of the tale but the more minute features of style as they have been discussed so far. Melville's style, with its resistance to symmetrical forms (for this is one way we can characterize it now)--a confining symmetry--is, quite simply, a style which accommodates these ragged edges.

One critic who has understood the quality of this intent better than most others is Warner Berthoff, who observes of Melville's story-telling, particularly in his late works, that

> ...it is in this free control of narrative succession, this precise formal response to his story's advancing power of implication, that we find the central compositional tact of Melville's art. It seems to me a creative tact of the very highest order. At his level best he will not force his tales out of their advancing line of truth--not for the

> sake of moral argument, nor for dramatic sensation, nor for any preconceived formality of design. He is indeed, in managing his materials, the least arbitrary of the great American writers--which is one reason, I think, why his work as a writer of stories seems to move the most insistently and yet naturally toward the free suggestiveness, the profounder creativity, of myth. [103]

This association between compositional tact and free narrative succession refers us back to Berthoff's vigorous defense of the genre of the *recit* or recital or, what Berthoff most commonly speaks of as "the told story," of which *Billy Budd* and, for that matter, *The Scarlet Letter*, are significant examples. Citing Ramon Fernandez, Berthoff distinguishes between the *roman* and the *recit*. "What mainly distinguishes the two modes," he says, "is 'that the event in the novel *takes place*,' as in a vital present, 'whereas that of the recital, the event *has taken place*,' and is now withdrawn from actual time and space into an abstract order of idea, or of recollection."[104] Berthoff then goes on to claim that the special virtue of the told story is "in its doubled focus--on the event and on the recapturing of it."[105] This, of course, involves the sacrifice of the "illusion of direct engagement with the ~~body of~~ experience", of, that is, dramatic representation, but there is nevertheless a dramatic propriety and power in this double focus.[106] "The events of life," Berthoff points out, "their 'conditions of apparition and development,'

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[103] Berthoff, p. 158

[104] Berthoff, p. 144. See Ramon Fernandez, "The Method of Balzac: The Recital, amd the Aesthetics of the Novel," in ~~his~~ *Messages*, trans. Montgomery Belgion (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1927), p. 63.

[105] Berthoff, p. 145.

> are in truth what they are known as, through description and through reasoning; and an art that manages to deliver an ordered knowledge of them, according to the mind's experience of discovering the conceivable manner of their existence, will not be less significant or less 'real' than an art that presumes to imitate their raw falling out.[107]

Furthermore,

> As the method of story-telling rehearses the recollection, in their known sequence, of events which have already reached some termination, it is peculiarly equipped to suggest the special dimension of the *historical* in passing reality,...Its discontinuities and anti-climaxes give it in fact something of the ruggedness of recorded history, in which most of what actually happened is obscured or lost yet significant actions may be traced out.[108]

Put another way, it is a form which performs "the valuable function of reproducing for our contemplation. . .the fundamental form and manner of our common apprehension of things" and this, in turn, can only be detectable as a style --"a painstaking casualness of exposition," as Berthoff describes it, which, moreover, "distinguishes all the stories and sketches Melville wrote between 1853 and 1856" but, of course, which also suitably characterizes the style of *Billy Budd*:

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[106] Berthoff, p. 146.
[107] Berthoff, p. 145.
[108] Berthoff, p. 146.

> Events are reported as they have fallen out, to observation or general hearsay; at the same time there is a continual pressure toward catching them up at once in some summary definition. The rhythm of the recital alternates accordingly between the quick pace of immediate happenings and the slower fluctuations of the teller's progress towards an understanding of them.[109]

It is fitting, then, to speak of this painstaking casualness as compositional tact, for it links submissive and respectful attention to the integrity of an object with the patiently conducted process of coming to know what it is--a patience which resists the simplifications and temptations of preemptive judgement. Melville makes us aware that such compositional tact is a condition of true knowledge--and, to advance this idea another step, one thinks naturally of what Morris Croll observed of the Baroque writers who, in their turn, exerted a significant influence on Melville--indeed, on the development of nineteenth-century prose. It is as if Melville knew--had an intuitively critical awareness of the fact

> that an idea separated from the act of experiencing it is not the idea that was experienced. The ardor of its conception in the mind is a necessary part of its truth; and unless it can be conveyed to another mind in something of the form of its occurrence, either it has changed into some other idea or it has ceased to be an idea, to have any existence whatsoever except a verbal one.[110]

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[109] Berthoff, p. 149.

[110] Morris Croll, "The Baroque Style in Prose," *Studies in English Philology*, eds. Kemp Malone and Martin B. Ruud (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1929), p. 430.

This involves a kind of humility that, to go back to Melville's introduction to the conclusion again, is not, it would seem, evident in "pure fiction." This statement is not to be understood as a rejection of fiction as incompatible with "truth uncompromisingly told" although this has proved tempting to Nina Baym, for example, in spite of the fact that it is not entirely clear what Melville means by "pure fiction."[111] We can illuminate this a bit by going back to an observation Melville makes at the end of chapter 2, after he makes note of Billy's stutter--a striking instance of the interference of "the arch-interferer, the envious marplot of Eden" and which we are to regard, in every way, as a ragged edge of his character:

> The avowal of such an imperfection in the Handsome Sailor should be evidence not alone that he is not presented as a conventional hero, but also that the story in which he is the main figure is no romance. (53)

"Romance" is easily substitutable, I think, for "pure fiction"--a kind of narration which has too much to do with "fable" in Melville's judgement and which will admit only the conventional--in this case, the legendary Handsome Sailor, "a *symmetric* (my italics) figure much above the average height"--as opposed to *our* Handsome Sailor who resists the simplifications that would be imposed by the already-defined figure of the Handsome Sailor. There is no mistaking, on Melville's part, of convention for original perception; conventions are a means of perception, of experimentally proceeding from the known, as defined by convention, to the previously unknown--and this, we have seen, is a careful and tactful process of noting similarities and differences. Romance, as Melville appears to conceive it, does not have the formal means to countenance the differences.

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[111] See Nina Baym, "Melville's Quarrel with Fiction," *PMLA*, 94 (1979), 909-923.

Nor, for that matter, does a narrative that restricts itself to "fact" have any special efficacy for Melville--for if his tale resists the symmetry of pure fiction it does not retreat from fiction, for his statement that his narrative has "less to do with fiction than with fact" suggests that he is charting the middle ground between fable and fact in much the same way that Hawthorne sought a working hypothesis to guide him between the extremes of romance and novel. Melville, in his turn, conceives the opposition in more extreme terms. There are, for example, the symmetries and regularities of the official account of what happened on board the *Bellipotent* as recorded in the News of the Mediterranean, which has a relevant presence in the tale inasmuch as it is a particularly inadequate account of the events. And this inadequacy has everything to do with the fact that it is a piece of journalism--a significant selection on Melville's part--for it is conducted in a style entirely stripped of ragged edges. Even more significant is Melville's notation that it is an account "doubtless for the most part written in good faith, though the medium, partly rumor, through which the facts must have reached the writer, served to deflect and partly falsify them." This is, of course, something of an understatement:

> 'On the tenth of the last month a deplorable occurrence took place on board the H.M.S. *Bellipotent*. John Claggart, the ship's master-at-arms, discovering that some sort of plot was incipient among an inferior section of the ship's company, and that the ringleader was one William Budd; he, Claggart, in the act of arraigning the man before the captain, was vindictively stabbed to the heart by the suddenly drawn sheath knife of Budd.
>
> 'The deed and the implement employed sufficiently suggest that though mustered into the service under an English name the assassin was no Englishman, but one of those aliens adopting English cognomens whom the present necessities of the service have caused to be admitted into it in considerable numbers.
>
> 'The enormity of the crime and the extreme depravity of the criminal appear the greater in view of the character of the victim, a middle-aged man respectable and discreet, belonging to that minor official grade, the petty officers, upon whom, as none know better than the commissioned gentlemen, the efficiency of His Majesty's navy so largely depends. His function was a responsible one, at once onerous and thankless; and his fidelity in it the greater because of his strong patriotic impulse. In this instance as in so many other instances these days, the character of this unfortunate man signally refutes, if refutation were needed, that peevish saying attributed to the late Dr. Johnson, that patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel.
>
> 'The criminal paid the penalty of his crime. The promptitude of the punishment has proved salutary. Nothing amiss is now apprehended aboard the H.M.S. *Bellipotent*.(130-131)

Indeed, the obvious falseness of this account is directly related to the falsifying limitations of the style of this passage--a judgement that one makes on the basis of the standard established by Melville's carefully induced rendering of character and action. We have before us here the crudest kind of deduction from mere appearances; the deed itself is enough to deduce Billy's character and naturally invites the distortion of the dagger through the heart and the conclusion that only a foreign conscript could commit such an act. The report of Claggart as "respectable and discreet" in his capacity of master-at-arms--the mere fact that he holds a position of authority--is sufficient to deduce *his* character. There is no mention at all of Vere--and this is not to be accounted as a mere oversight on Melville's part, as Hayford and Sealts suggest.[112] It is, instead, suggestive of the fact that Vere's actions are unexceptional given the facts of the case as they are understood in this account--understood, that is, within the extremely limited point of view of the common-sense report. Melville's judgement of the "News" account, indeed, has all the force of Coleridge's rejection of the "plain good common-sense sort of writing" as an inadequate instrument of truth. He makes his point by quoting and translating a passage from Grynaeus' preface to Ficino's translation of Plato. It is both a warning and a prophecy, and Coleridge wonders whether or not "since the Revolution of 1680 [*sic*] it has gradually been fulfilled:"

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[112] See Hayford and Sealts, p. 200. In their note to leaf 340 of the manuscript, they argue that the substance of chapter 29, in which this passage appears, antedates Melville's elaboration of Vere's character. Vere is "evidently at first identified not by name but only as 'the commander' or 'the Captain,' as here." Melville presumably forgot to alter this, and this serves for Hayford and Sealts as evidence that the tale is "unfinished." But, of course, having found a plausible reason for the omission, we don't need to follow them in this instance.

> --A course of study (if such reading, with such a purpose in view, could deserve that name) which, if not corrected in time, will occasion worse consequences than even barbarism did in the times of our forefathers. Barbarism is, I own, a wilful headstrong thing; but with all its blind obstinacy it has less power of doing harm than this self-sufficient, self-satisfied *plain good common-sense* sort of writing, this prudent saleable popular style of composition, if it be deserted by Reason and scientific Insight; pitiably decoying the minds of men by an imposing shew of amiableness, and practical Wisdom, so that the delighted Reader knowing nothing knows *all about* almost everything. There will succeed therefore in my opinion, and that too within no long time, to the rudeness and rusticity of our age, that ensnaring meretricious *popularness* in Literature, with all the tricksy humilities of the ambitious candidates for the favorable suffrages of the judicious Public, which if we do not take good care will break up and scatter before it all robustness and manly vigor of intellect, all masculine fortitude of virtue.[113]

Hence, the justification of the "inside" narrative which establishes itself as a means of feeling one's way into the heart of the events on board the *Bellipotent*--which, accordingly, resists the simplifications of the "News" account but also the equally sentimental treatment of Billy offered in the sailor's ballad, "Billy in the Darbies", at the end of the tale.

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[113] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Friend*, I, ed. Barbara Rooke, Vol. IV of *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, General ed., Kathleen Coburn (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), pp. 23-24.

VIII. The Gentleman and the Harp of Orpheus

> 'Come hither, broken hearted; here is another life without the guilt of intermediate death; here are wonders supernatural, without dying for them. Come hither! bury thyself in a life, which to your now equally abhorred and abhorring landed world, is more oblivious than death. Come hither! put up *thy* gravestone, too, within the churchyard, and come hither, till we marry thee!''[14]

In the previous chapter, I have tried to give a sense of the forms of gentlemanly care on both a large and small scale and of their enabling capacity as an instrument of true judgement. But all of this has been a necessary preparation for a close consideration of how this style can, accordingly, give access to and discover the tragic significance of Billy's execution. This involves paying particular attention to the long sequence of chapters (18-27) in which Melville renders the events surrounding and including Billy's execution with an intensified patience and what we feel is a vigilant, because so vigorously challenged, care. That we feel this is primarily because we notice, at the same time, how the "asymmetrical" impulses of Melville's style that we have noted so far assume subtler and more delicate proportions. This, in turn, is primarily responsible for what is certainly one of the greatest stretches of prose that one is likely to encounter in nineteenth-century American fiction.

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[14] Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*, eds. Harrison Hayford and Hershel Parker (New York: Norton, 1967), p. 402.

To reiterate, the tension in *Billy Budd* between the principles of order and justice and the allegiance due to each is extreme. That is, in a time of war and national emergency, the most purely innocent of men is victimized by the most purely malicious, and kills him in an act of pure natural justice; and yet, is tried, found guilty and executed according to the most purely authoritarian and unjust of laws. The law is, nevertheless, administered by a man--Vere--who, with great honesty of mind, understands emotionally and intellectually both sides of the issue.

It is necessary to stress that this is the sort of conflict that, given the nature of the problem, a gentleman is particularly susceptible to because of his sensitive and honest apprehension of both sides of the issue. Vere's susceptibility is made explicitly clear often enough for us to understand that his approach to the problem posed by Billy is that of the gentleman, in whom we see that "the gentleman is a MAN" in the sense that he is most perfectly a man.[115] We note, for example, how Vere puts his position to the officers at Budd's trial, as he observes among them

> a troubled hesitancy, proceeding, I doubt not, from the clash of military duty with moral scruple--a scruple vitalized by compassion. For the compassion, how can I otherwise than share it? But, mindful of paramount obligations, I strive against scruples that may tend to enervate decision. Not, gentlemen, that I hide from myself that the case is an exceptional one.(110)

If, that is, he feels due compassion, compassion in line with the exceptional nature of the case, he is also mindful of paramount obligations--more than anyone on board the *Bellipotent* is capable of--which in his judgement take precedence. His allegiance to military duty is, of course, a paramount obligation and his course is prescribed for him. But his sense of duty as a military commander in this instance connects up with his allegiance to "his settled convictions" which

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[115] Vernon, p.564

> were as a dike against those invading waters of novel opinion social, political, and otherwise, which carried away as in a torrent no few minds in those days, minds by nature not inferior to his own. While other members of that aristocracy to which he belonged were incensed at the innovators mainly because their theories were inimical to the privileged classes, Captain Vere disinterestedly opposed them not alone because they seemed to him insusceptible of embodiment in lasting institutions, but at war with the peace of the world and the true welfare of mankind.(62-63)

It is this particular quality of allegiance that helps us fill out our image of Vere as the embodiment of a gentlemanly and, hence, central intelligence, as a glimpse at the courtesy literature confirms:

> The Christian gentleman occupies an important position in the commonwealth; hence, he considers it a duty as obvious as binding, to promote the public welfare to the utmost of his power. To obtain, therefore, a clear and settled view as to how this object may be best accomplished, is a matter to him of no slight moment
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> Thus though his principles are settled--for instability is not consistent with his general character,--yet contingencies will occur amid the changes and chances to which the public machine is especially liable, which he endeavors to estimate with candor and judgement, and thence to act with discretion and prudence. He strives to be firm

> without tenacity; and as he makes a conscience of all he says and does, he stands on a far higher and more certain ground than those who are influenced by worldly expediency....[116]

But of more immediate and practical relevance to a discussion of *Billy Budd* is the stress Melville places on the fact that Vere's settled convictions are supported and enriched by study, which, incidently, is also a trait of the gentleman.[117] He favors "those books to which every serious mind of superior order occupying an active post of authority in the world naturally inclines," but, in particular, "unconventional writers like Montaigne, who, free from cant and convention, honestly and in the spirit of common sense philosophize on realities."(62) If there is any passage from Montaigne's *Essays* which can serve as a useful perspective on what Melville was trying to do in *Billy Budd* and on the kind of "confirmation" Vere might find "of his own more reserved thoughts," it is to be found in the conclusion to "Of Custom, and That We Should Not Easily Change a Law Received." Here it is from Cotton's translation:

> So it is, nevertheless, that Fortune, still reserving her authority in defiance of whatever we are able to do or say, sometimes presents us with a necessity so urgent, that 'tis requisite the laws should yield a little and give way; and when one opposes the increase of an innovation that thus intrudes itself by violence, to keep a man's self in so doing, in all places and in all things within

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[116] Sir A. Edmonstone, *The Christian Gentleman's Daily Walk*, 3rd ed. (London, 1850), pp.81-3, as quoted in A. Smythe-Palmer, *The Ideal of a Gentleman* (London: George Routledge and Sons, n.d.), p. 106.

[117] Edmonstone, pp. 44-45, as quoted in Smythe-Palmer, p. 335.

> bounds and rules against those who have the power, and to whom all things are lawful that may any way serve to advance their design, who have no other law nor rule but what serves best to their own purpose, 'tis a dangerous obligation and an intolerable inequality,...forasmuch as the ordinary discipline of a healthful state does not provide against these extraordinary accidents; it presupposes a body that supports itself in its principal members and offices, and a common consent to its obedience and observation. A legitimate proceeding is cold, heavy, and constrained, and not fit to make head against a head-strong and unbridled proceeding.

In illustration, Montaigne observes:

> 'Tis known to be, to this day, cast ~~in~~ the dish of those two great men, Octavius and Cato, in the two civil wars of Sylla and Caesar, that they would rather suffer their country to undergo the last extremities, than relieve their fellow citizens at the expense of its laws, or be guilty of any innovation; for in truth, in these last necessities, where there is no other remedy, it would peradventure, be more discreetly done, to stoop and yield a little to receive the blow, than, by opposing without possibility of doing good, to give occasion to violence to trample all under foot; and better to make the laws do what they can when they cannot do what they would.[118]

Indeed, it is difficult to think of how a single passage could direct us more surely to how Melville has delimited the broad lines of the action of *Billy Budd*, and, yet, the correspondence is there, and one should take advantage of it.'[11] For the story is, of course, built around an urgent necessity growing out of an extraordinary accident--the killing of Claggart by Budd--which takes us out of the realm of the ordinary discipline of a healthful state. And it is a situation in which the cold, heavy, and constrained pace of the "legitimate proceeding" is in direct and uncluttered confrontation with a "head-strong and unbridled proceeding." We have, that is, the blunt instrument of the Mutiny Act and Vere's unquestionable commitment to it placed squarely against not only his own feelings, but also the sympathetic feeling of the crew for Budd, a feeling that we are never allowed to separate from "the headstrong and unbridled proceeding" of the mutinies. The situation, moreover, is immeasurably complicated--more than Montaigne's historical examples will permit--by the fact that Vere's "dangerous obligation" is intensified not only by the lack of discretion he is permitted by the law but also the risk of inflaming the crew if he were to appear to waver in strictly applying it. It is within these constraints that he must, and ultimately does, find a way of stooping and yielding a little to receive the blow. Vere, in fact, is able to discover and stay within the very narrow margin between the formalism of Octavius and Cato, on the one hand, and "lawless innovation" on the other. In this we recognize that one of Melville's purposes in *Billy Budd* is to explore this narrow ground and, from this, to work out how much of a little is necessary and possible in these circumstances.

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[118] Michel de Montaigne, *Essays*, trans. John Cotton (London: Bell, 1913), I, 116-117. See Robert Shulman, "Montaigne and the Techniques of Tragedy of Melville's *Billy Budd*," *Comparative Literature*, 16 (1964), 322, n. 1. Shulman concludes that Melville in all probability purchased William Hazlitt's 1842 edition of Cotton's translation. See also Aretta J. Stevens, "The Edition of Montaigne Read by Melville," *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 62 (1968), 130-134. Stevens concurs with Shulman, adding that it would be just as likely for Melville to have owned the 1845 impression because of the proximity of the publication date with records of his purchasing date. With the exception of the title page, there are no resettings or intentional changes that would effect the text.

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[11] For a useful discussion of the relevance of Montaigne to *Billy Budd*, see W.G. Kilbourne, "Montaigne and Captain Vere," *American Literature*, 33 (1962), 514-517.

But, although hunting down the relevance of Melville's allusion to Montaigne does help us to organize our thinking about *Billy Budd*, we also recognize that *Billy Budd* is a reworking of a problem that Melville was intensely concerned with throughout his career after *Moby-Dick*--and Montaigne does not solve it for him. We have only to recall "Bartleby the Scrivener", *Pierre*, and *The Confidence Man* to see that Melville consistently tests his gentlemen and the gentlemanly virtues with the sorts of extreme situations which disable them, or, at least, threaten to--situations which give rise to conflicting poles of allegiance that define and narrow "the deadly space between." Montaigne can only redirect us to Melville's effort to discover if right action by a man with an honest and sensitive mind is possible in the narrow ground. In *Billy Budd*, the reverential gentleman is tragically vindicated, but this is a judgement that finally depends upon our looking very closely at just how fully responsive and equal to the crisis on board the *Bellipotent* Vere is. This means calling attention to how Melville's style brings to life Vere's exquisitely delicate and tactful application of the law through his orchestration of the supportive and enabling forms of military discipline.

Indeed, we do notice, as we reach the critical stage of the action beginning in chapter 18, the considerable attention, both in action and commentary, that is paid to the details of military decorum. The chapter opens with an account of the *Bellipotent*'s brief engagement with a French frigate--the only military engagement the *Bellipotent* is involved in--and it is after this engagement that Claggart takes the well-timed opportunity, "not long after the pursuit had been given up, and ere the excitement incident thereto had altogether waned away," to approach the captain with his accusation:

> ...the master-at-arms, ascending from his cavernous sphere, made his appearance cap in hand by the mainmast respectfully waiting the notice of Captain Vere, then solitary walking the weather side of the quarter-deck, doubtless chafed at the failure of the pursuit. The spot where Claggart stood was the place allotted to men of lesser grades seeking some more particular interview either with the officer of the deck or the captain himself. But from the latter it was not often that a sailor or a petty officer of those days would seek a hearing. Only some exceptional cause would, according to established custom, have warranted that.(91)

Such particular observations of the manners and customs of sailors recall the quasi-anthropological and sociological documentation of Melville's earlier sailing narratives, particularly *Redburn* and *White-Jacket*. The minute attention to degree and place--the captain, for example, taking his place on the quarter-deck, on the weather side of the ship, and Claggart standing in the *alloted* place below, by the mainmast--reminds us, of course, that life on board a man-of-war is highly structured and rigorously patterned. However, as we eventually discover in *Billy Budd*, these customs and manners are deeply implicated in the action of the story in such a way that *Billy Budd* is, in a radical sense, a novel of manners. These manners and customs constitute the available forms of action, forms which give shape and significance to the conduct of every man on board. But also, by implication, they are the ground for the precise evaluation of conduct and, moreover, are taken for granted as such. We feel that the sheer particularity of detail, in both the passage I have just quoted and throughout the rest of this stretch of the tale, hooked into the action as it is, is especially justified. For it provides a kind of emphasis that is in direct proportion to the immediacy of the threat of insurrection. It represents an intensification of concentration, a tightening of the grip, a bracing--in all events, an adjustment of style--which is a due response to the fact that the continuing stability of these manners and customs as the forms of order and coherence cannot, under the circumstances, be taken for granted.

This intensification and concentration is apparent again later on in the encounter between Vere and Claggart. Vere, of course, is very sensitive to the immediacy of the threat to the security of the ship and we see this initially in the way he responds to Claggart's approach and subsequent accusation of Budd. Claggart himself, as has already been suggested, takes maximum advantage of the situation by seeking a hearing in the customary but nevertheless very public way, which indicates to all on board ship "some exceptional cause." Moreover, he does this before the excitement aroused by the engagement with the French frigate has subsided--this in a time when, as Melville is careful to remind us earlier on, it was common for the battery lieutenants "to stand with drawn swords behind the men working the guns."(59) Claggart further attempts to alarm Vere by recalling to his attention the anxieties he must feel "in view of those extraordinary outbreaks" of recent memory. Vere, in his turn, is more than equal to Claggart's unctuous and transparent efforts to manipulate him--and he is distrustful of Claggart even before he names Budd as the man in question. He must, of course, investigate the matter and, because of the recent mutinies, as discreetly as possible--without, that is, unnecessary publicity lest he "keep the idea of lingering disaffection alive." Still, as alert as Vere is, his caution is not quite sufficient, although through no oversight of his own. The men simply know that something is up:

> The measure he determined upon involved a shifting of the scene, a transfer to a place less exposed to observation than the broad quarter-deck. For although the few gun-room officers there at the time had, in due observance of naval etiquette, withdrawn to leeward the moment Captain Vere had begun his promenade on the deck's weather side; and though during the colloquy with Claggart they of course ventured not to diminish the distance; and though throughout the interview Captain Vere's voice was far from high, and Claggart's silvery and low; and the wind in the cordage and the wash of the sea helped the more to put them beyond earshot; nevertheless, the interview's continuance already had attracted observation from some top-men aloft

> and other sailors in the waist or further forward.(96-97)

Again, the style works to insist that everything on board the *Bellipotent* is *in place* through the accumulation of detail--the precise distance that the officers keep from Vere and the decorous attention they pay to giving Vere the weather side of the ship. But no less important a source of this sense of insistent order is the patterning if rhetorically stiff rhythm of the subordinate clauses which accommodate this detail and hold it before our attention. Even so, this measured rhythm is not sufficient to absorb entirely the disruptive effect "the interview's continuance" has on the crew. As highly structured and patterned as military decorum is--indeed, because of this--any variance from established custom--the slightest trace of the unusual or novel--is set off with sharp definition. And with the mutinies in the background, and the consequent emphasis and definition given to the former, the sharper is the crew's perception of the latter.

The crew's response, although apparently insignificant, is, in fact, our first glimpse of how near the surface the spirit of insurrection is and, by implication, how vulnerable is the order on board ship. Vere is able to smooth over this disruption to some extent by tactfully reasserting the sense of a steady, controlled and routine proceeding. He orders, for example, his hammock-boy, Albert, (rather than, say, an officer--for obvious reasons) to summon and to usher

Budd aft, instructing him to make sure that Budd speaks to no one, to keep him busy with conversation, and not to inform him until he is well aft that he is wanted in Vere's cabin. Vere then appropriately orders Claggart to make a show himself on deck but, at the same time, to stand by quietly and wait for Albert and Budd to appear and then follow them in.

But a more strenuous challenge to this vulnerable order comes with Claggart's death at the hands of Budd in the privacy of Vere's cabin. It is, to be sure, an "extraordinary accident" in Montaigne's sense and one which Vere responds to with the proportionately firm yet flexible insistence on the customary forms. Thus, after he has recovered sufficiently from the initial shock of the event, he convenes a drumhead court with an attendant and quickened attention to "usage." He is convinced that, unless he moves promptly, the news of Claggart's death might "tend to awaken any slumbering embers of the Nore among the crew." He is accordingly "glad that it would not be at variance with usage to turn the matter over to a summary court of his own officers. . . ."(104) Vere's emphasis on "usage" here is on its character as the predictable, because customary, form of response to given circumstances and is of particular concern to Vere because, as such, it is a guarantee against the arbitrary and capricious exercise of power. It is especially relevant here as a check against arbitrarily varying the punishment required by the Mutiny Act--against, that is, arbitrary clemency. This is the impulse that Vere detects in the other members of the drumhead court and he successfully persuades them not to submit to this potentially overwhelming temptation--keeping in mind, again, that they are asked to superintend the slaughter of the spiritually innocent--by appealing to their instincts as officers. It is simply too clear, as Vere argues, that Budd's action, when announced to the crew,

> however it be worded in the announcement, will be plain homicide committed in a flagrant act of mutiny. What penalty for that should follow, they know. But it does not follow. *Why*? they will ruminate. You know what sailors are. Will they not revert to the recent outbreak at the Nore? Ay. They know the well-founded alarm--the panic it struck throughout England. Your clement sentence they would account pusillanimous. They would think that we flinch, that we are afraid of them--afraid of practicing that awful rigor singularly demanded at this juncture, lest it should provoke new troubles. What shame to us such a conjecture on their part, and how deadly to discipline. (112-113)

Moreover, "practicing that awful rigor" requires the exact and rigorous definition of their roles as officers that military decorum provides and announces. For Vere, this means a repeated assertion and rehearsal, down to the most minute of details, of his role as commander, as we see, for example, at the beginning of Budd's trial:

> All being quickly in readiness, Billy Budd was arraigned, Captain Vere necessarily appearing as the sole witness in the case, and as such temporarily sinking his rank, though properly maintaining it in a matter apparently trivial, namely, that he testified from the ship's weather side, with that object having caused the court to sit on the lee side. (105)

I say "repeated assertion and rehearsal" because, as is now apparent, we can see a pattern developing--an emerging rhythm of, on the one hand, a felt challenge and threat to the continuing order on board ship, as yet latent and anticipated, set off and confronted by, on the other hand, an acting out of formal procedure. As the strength of the former increases, precipitated by Budd's killing of Claggart and recorded in the repeated and accumulating emphasis given to the Nore Mutiny, so does Vere, with an even greater intensity, concentrate on the particular forms by which he asserts his ascendancy as commander. Our sense of this intensification comes not only from the fact that Vere's gesture of ascendancy--his keeping to the weather side of the ship, with his subordinates to leeward--is a repeated instance of it, and thus, gathers into itself an accumulated emphasis. It also has its source in the fact that it is such ~~a~~ very minute articulation of ascendancy relative to the earlier instances. This is an attention to form which, as Melville notes, is "apparently trivial," that is, trivial to those who do not have a feeling for the extremity of the situation and who do not recognize this intensified concentration as an appropriate adjustment to it.

Furthermore, if Vere's gesture serves as a form of defining and expressing his authority, it is also a means of self-control, of controlling his sympathy for Budd and the consequent temptations of arbitrary clemency which he feels more keenly than the rest of the drumhead court. He deals with these temptations with a quality of concentration that we feel on the level of a muscular response. While the court deliberates, exchanging "looks of troubled indecision, Vere

> for a time stood-unconsciously with his back toward them, apparently in one of his absent fits--gazing out from a sashed porthole to windward upon the monotonous blank of the twilight sea. But the court's silence continuing, broken only at moments by brief consultations, in low earnest tones, this served to arouse him and energize him. Turning, he to-and-fro paced the cabin athwart; in the returning ascent to windward climbing the slant deck in the ship's lee roll, without knowing it symbolizing thus in his action a mind resolute to surmount difficulties even if against primitive instincts as strong as the wind and the sea.(109)

Melville spells out the symbolic action here rather heavy-handedly--a measure no doubt of a certain insecurity he feels about his audience. But if the point is made rather obviously, the sense of effort in Vere's gesture is nevertheless significant. Vere's primitive instinct--the pull of feeling stimulated by the unique circumstances of Budd's case--is resisted by him but not to the point where he obscures it to himself or evades it. He achieves, instead, an extraordinarily delicate balance between his acquiescence to the implacable presence of this feeling, on the one hand, and his keen sense of how it, on the other hand, must be judged, and, accordingly, subordinated. His gesture accommodates and resolves the consequent tension between them and is, as such, the form and body of an exact estimation and submissive acknowledgement of the extraordinary case.

However, granted that Vere is firm, and that his firmness, along with its variable intensity, is a necessary response, he is, nevertheless, like the gentleman, "firm without tenacity." Because of his capacity to acknowledge and control this pressure of feeling within himself, he is able to sympathize with the court's difficulty in imposing the necessary penalty. Even more important, this capacity allows him to anticipate the strength of feeling among the crew once the matter is made known to them. This is, in turn, a sensitivity which makes him fully aware of just how dangerous his position is. For, again, his problem is to find a way to stoop and yield a little to the pressure of ungoverned feeling so as to avoid the stiff insensitivity and, thus, the fragility of the martinet but not so much as to abandon legal principle, in circumstances where the middle ground between these two alternatives is difficult to define. But even though Vere's minute attention to form smacks of the martinet, we can now understand his actions here as an effort to lay down a firm foundation for carefully calculated and tactful departures from usage as the practical means of acknowledging and accommodating this emotional pressure. This is, after all, what firmness without tenacity means.

That Vere makes such departures is apparent from the moment Claggart accuses Billy on the quarter-deck, where, as we have already seen, Vere cautiously moves to keep Claggart's accusation from the attention of the crew. The trial itself is conducted *in camera* where it is, according to some authorities, customary to hold it in public.[120] The most important reason for this departure is, like the first, to avoid provocative publicity. But, in addition, because the prolonged absence of Budd and Claggart is finally sufficient to "awaken speculations among the ship's company as to what it was that could be detaining" them in Vere's cabin, Vere's secretiveness has the salutary effect of preparing them for what would otherwise be a shocking and potentially disruptive revelation. We can see this when the announcement of Claggart's death and Budd's fate is finally made:

> When, therefore, in weather not at all tempestuous, all hands were called in the second dogwatch, a summons under such circumstances not usual in those hours, the crew were not wholly unprepared for some announcement extraordinary, one having connection too with the continued absence of the two men from their wonted haunts. (116)

The announcement, that is, is made by means of a departure from usage which absorbs the extraordinary within a cushioning predictability that Vere maintains through his cautious handling of the affair. This, in turn, is complemented by other similarly tactful measures designed to ensure against shocking or alarming the men by providing them with an opportunity to absorb the impact of the news. For, example, Budd is finally convicted and sentenced to hang by the court but "in the early morning watch, it being now night." "Otherwise," as Melville carefully notes,

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[120] See C.B.Ives, "*Billy Budd* and the Articles of War," *American Literature*, 34 (1977), 36.

> as is customary in such cases, the sentence would forthwith have been carried out. In wartime on the field or in the fleet, a mortal punishment decreed by a drumhead court--on the field sometimes decreed by but a nod from the general--follows without delay on the heel of conviction, without appeal. (114)

Another important purpose served by the *in camera* proceeding is that it permits Vere the time and the privacy necessary to ensure the court's support--which, of course, is not immediately forthcoming--for the necessary guilty verdict before the matter is made public. In order to effect the latter, he appoints the captain of the marines to the court. In doing so, "the commander perhaps deviated from the general custom." But this is justifiable because Vere--referred to here as *the commander* so as to emphasize that he deviates from general custom *as* commander and not through some merely private motive--feels that the marine officer is judicious and thoughtful and, thus, is "not altogether incapable of grappling with a case unprecedented in his prior experience."(104) In striking the court, moreover, Vere reserves the right of "formally or informally interposing at need" and, indeed, he does interpose informally with his attempts to persuade the court of the necessity of arriving at a guilty verdict and of imposing the prescribed penalty. And because of his strenuous efforts to guide the reluctant court to a satisfactory decision, he observes, correctly enough, that "strangely we prolong proceedings that should be summary" in the face of the dangerous possibility that "the enemy may be sighted and engagement result"--this on the heels of the brief and fruitless chase of the French frigate.

On the whole, then, these instances reveal that Vere finds his way to the narrow ground through the discretionary accommodation of his authority and duty, on the one hand, with the opposing pull of natural and potentially ungovernable feeling on the other. It is a quality of discretion which is clearly but finely distinguished from the arbitrary--whether this involves capriciously hardening (and, unfortunately for his cousin, Guert Gansevoort, Melville puts the *Somers* affair, by way of comparison, in this unfavorable light) or relinquishing his position. Moreover, it is only available to a reverent man like Vere--a man, that is, who has achieved that delicate balance and heedful openness of the sympathetic and critical intelligence.

But now we are in a position to see what happens when this same quality of intelligence and, accordingly, Melville's creative apprehension of it in his style, is confronted by the even more trying sequence of events which follow the trial. The sequence begins with Vere's announcement of Billy's sentence. As already noted, all hands are called for the second dogwatch in circumstances "not usual in those hours:"

> On either side of the quarter-deck the marine guard under arms was drawn up; and Captain Vere, standing in his place surrounded by all the wardroom officers, addressed his men. In so doing, his manner showed neither more nor less than that properly

> pertaining to his supreme position aboard his own ship. In clear terms and concise he told them what had taken place in the cabin: that the master-at-arms was dead, that he who had killed him had been already tried by a summary court and condemned to death, and that the execution would take place in the early morning watch. The word *mutiny* was not named in what he said. He refrained too from making the occasion an opportunity for any preachment as to the maintenance of naval discipline, thinking perhaps that under the existing circumstances in the navy the consequence of violating discipline should be made to speak for itself.(116)

With a sense of the present emergency at hand and with the now familiar heedful emphasis on the "existing circumstances in the navy," we note again the responsively studied articulation of formal procedure, which, as we have discovered, is an enactment of the sense of exertion inhering in Vere's tactful adjustments to the occasion. But the threat to the order on board ship is no longer latent:

> Their captain's announcement was listened to by the throng of standing sailors in a dumbness like that of a seated congregation of believers in hell listening to the clergyman's announcement of his Calvinistic text.
>
> At the close, however, a confused murmur went up. It began to wax.(117)

Even so, we nevertheless see that the suddenness of the crew's outburst of shocked feeling is fully anticipated and met with a proportionately swift and precisely timed formal and ordering response:

> All but instantly, then, at a sign, it was pierced and suppressed by shrill whistles of the boatswain and his mates. The word was given to about ship.(117)

The noticeably quickened pace of the prose at this critical moment is an exact representation of this quick and urgent exchange of challenge and response and, by implication, is a register of how the ordinarily cold heavy and constrained pace of the legitimate proceeding, as Montaigne describes it, can, in fact, keep a controlled pace with the emergence of a headstrong and unbridled will, bending to its pressure but, at the same time, subduing it. For this, indeed, is what happens. The crew's confused murmur, just as it begins to grow in strength, is pierced and deflated as the crew's attention is redirected back to the routine of running the ship.

Formal procedure, in Vere's hands, thus is capable of a variable pace but, at the same time, it never loses its integrity as a single and continuous movement which, in the present emergency, has a crucial efficacy as the means of sifting, arranging, and gathering into itself the confused and unorganized feeling--the contrary and discordant movement--of the crew. Once this particular critical moment passes, we are returned to the steadier pace which is natural to the routine, something like a cold, heavy, and constrained pace but, still, something more conscious of and alive to the situation on board the *Bellipotent* than Montaigne's phrase allows. There is, first, the slightest hint of abruptness in the way this movement is reestablished, as we see in the transition to the very next paragraph:

> To be prepared for burial Claggart's body was delivered to certain petty officers of his mess. And here, not to clog the sequel with lateral matters, it may be added that at a suitable hour, the master-at-arms was committed to the sea with every funeral honor properly belonging to his naval grade.

But then, picking up and carrying forward the concern expressed here for "the *suitable* hour" at which Claggart is buried, with every honor *properly* belonging to his naval grade," the whole movement finally settles again into the ample, measured, and concentrated rehearsal and articulation of form:

> In this proceeding as in every public one growing out of the tragedy *strict adherence to usage* was observed. Nor at any point could it have been at all deviated from, either with respect to Claggart or Billy Budd, without begetting undesirable speculations in the ship's company, sailors, particularly men-of-war's men, being of all men the greatest *sticklers for usage*. For similar cause, all communication between Captain Vere and the condemned one ended,...the latter being now surrendered to the *ordinary routine* preliminary to the end. His transfer under guard from the captain's quarters was effected *without unusual precautions*--at least, no visible ones. If possible, not to let the men so much as surmise that their officers anticipate aught amiss from them is the *tacit rule* in a military ship. And the more that some sort of trouble should really be apprehended the more do the officers keep that apprehension to themselves, though not the less *unostentatious vigilance* may be augmented. In the present instance, the sentry placed over the prisoner had *strict orders* to let no one have communication with him but the chaplain. And certain *unobtrusive measures* were taken to absolutely insure this point.(117)

The crisis is not over yet, as we shall see, but, for the moment, it is sufficient to observe that this is the first stage of a broader movement which enacts the order-inducing rhythm of formal routine. But since it has proved impossible to discuss the action at this point as it is apprehended in the prose without alluding to its rhythmic properties and to a sense that, in every way, Vere has *orchestrated* the peace on board ship, it will be useful--before going on to discuss how this broad movement is defined--to look ahead and to seize upon the relevance of Vere's oft-quoted and badly misunderstood remarks on form. As Melville quotes him:

> 'With mankind,' he would say, 'forms, measured forms, are everything; and that is the import couched in the story of Orpheus with his lyre spellbinding the wild denizens of the wood.' And this he once applied to the disruption of forms going on across the Channel and the consequences thereof.(128)

This is as direct a statement as any of Vere's commitment to "measured form" as a condition of civilization. But for most readers this position is contradicted and repudiated by Melville's rejection of the "symmetry of form"--discussed in the previous chapter--as an adequate vehicle of understanding, as if, that is, "measured form" were equivalent to and as limiting as this symmetry. So it is with Marlene Longenecker, who is a representative voice. She argues, for example, that "measured form as a description of civilized order and ragged form as an uncompromised truth are offered as unreconciled alternatives."[12] Accordingly, "Vere's position is shown to be inadequate by its very exclusivity."

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[12] Marlene Longenecker, "Captain Vere and the Form of Truth," *Studies in Short Fiction*, 14 (1977), 338.

Nevertheless, it should be clear that what we have seen with "measured form"--or, at least, "form" as we have seen it activated so far--is the very essence of sensitive inclusiveness within the necessary constraints without which "inclusiveness" would have no meaning. But this would be, after all, the nature of form that is "measured," for one of the senses of "measured" relevant here is "to an extent or degree not excessive," of due limitation, neither beyond nor without measure.

This leads us to the other relevant sense of "measured" which is, according to the *O.E.D.*, "having a rhythmic structure as concerned with the division into measures consisting of a uniform number of beats and time units." We have already seen how measured forms in this sense, defined as they are by the measured strokes of military procedure, are, indeed, "everything" and that, furthermore, they have the same efficacy and import as they do with Orpheus, whom Vere implicitly identifies himself with. Some readers have been quick to point out how sure an indication this is of Melville's judgement against Vere. Longenecker, for example, observes that "Vere's typological identification with Orpheus as a lawmaker, not as an artist, is in the largest sense a failure of the imagination."[122] And with confident outrage, Bruce Franklin concurs: "This grotesquely perverted view of poetry, music, imagination, and beauty is contradicted on every level--aesthetic, ontological, and ethical--by the form and content of *Billy Budd, Sailor*."[123] But both Longenecker and Franklin should be aware that the Orpheus present in *Billy Budd* is no romantic aesthete but the Orpheus of the humanist tradition who represents the equation of eloquence and civilization.[124] Indeed, as Natalis Comes in his *Mythologiae* asserts, in what stands as a fairly representative view, human society depends on the great poet:

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[122] Longenecker, p. 339.

> For that race of ancient poets knew everything, quite unlike those of our own day who think the whole art of poetry to consist merely of verbal quantities and metric; or who babble away to flatter some important man, hoping to snap up some trivial gift that might pop into his mind. The songs of the ancient poets, on the other hand, were revered like the holiest laws. Cities quarrelling over something would commonly take a poet's song as a sentence of the weightiest judgement. In fact, Orpheus' great power of speech was said to be such that, when men were panic-stricken and through some great disaster fallen into despair, he would restore them to their original state and bring their minds peace. The man who could do things like this is the kind of man the rest of society must acknowledge as superior, rather than the man who lives only for himself, surrounded by his amassed wealth, selfishly enjoying the fruits of his wisdom which remain just as useless to the rest of mankind as if he had never been born.[125]

So too with Boccaccio is Orpheus in every way both a "lawmaker"--as Longenecker puts it--and an artist:

> With [his lyre] Orpheus moves woods whose powerful roots are imbedded in the earth, which represent obstinate opinionated men who can be moved from

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[123] Franklin, p. 206.

[124] See Thomas H. Cain, "Spenser and the Renaissance Orpheus," *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 41 (1971), 25-47.

[125] Natalis Comes, *Mythologiae sive explicationis fabularum libri decem* (Venice, 1568), 7.14 (pp. 226v-8v), as quoted in Cain, pp. 27-28. The translation is Cain's.

> their stubbornness only by the powers of eloquence. He arrests the flow of rivers, that is, unstable and lustful men who are destined to flow into the sea of unending bitterness unless the powerful pronouncements [*demonstrationibus*] of eloquence confirm them in manly virtue. He tames fierce animals, that is, bloodthirsty men, who can often be restored to mildness and humanity only by some wise man's eloquence.[126]

Similarly, and where the correspondence between Orpheus and Vere appears most clearly, there is Spenser's conception of Orpheus in *The Faerie Queene* as the maker of Concord in his pacification of the Argonauts: "Such as was *Orpheus*, that when strife was growen/ Amongst those famous ympes of Greece, did take/ His silver Harpe in hand, and shortly friends them make."[127]

Significantly, the tradition was not lost to the nineteenth century as it is, it would appear, to the twentieth-century academic critic. Thomas Carlyle, for example, speaks of Orpheus in distinctly Renaissance terms:

> Was it not the still higher Orpheus, or Orpheuses, who, in past centuries, by the divine Music of Wisdom, succeeded in civilizing Man?...Not only was Thebes built by the music of an Orpheus; but without the music of some inspired Orpheus was no city ever built, no work that man glories in ever done.[128]

And Samuel Taylor Coleridge has ~~his~~ own story to tell of a heroic captain of a man-of-war, Sir Alexander Ball, who upon assuming command, inherited a mutinous crew, several of whom

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[126] Boccaccio, *Genealogie deorum gentilium libri*, ed. Vincenzo Romano, 2 vols. (Bari, 1951), 5.12 (I, 244-7), as quoted in Cain, p. 27. The translation, again, is Cain's.

[127] *FQ*, 4.2.1.

[128] Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus* (London: Dent, 1984), p. 199.

"had become sailors by compromise of punishment." The new captain confronts "the furious spirit" of the crew with a system of discipline "as near as possible to that of ordinary law--as much as possible, he avoided, in his own person, the appearance of any will or arbitrary power to vary, or to remit punishment."[129] They are miraculously subdued:

> Ruffians, who like old Buccaneers had been used to inflict torture on themselves for sport, or in order to harden themselves beforehand, were tamed and overpowered, how or why they themselves knew not.[130]

For Coleridge, the explanation lies in the "*invisible*", "irresistible" and "aweful [*sic*] power of LAW, acting on natures pre-configured to its influences."[131] Following from this, Coleridge goes on to ask:

> ...who dares struggle with an *invisible* combatant? with an enemy which exists and makes us know its existence--but *where* it is, we ask in vain.--No space contains it--time promises no control over it--it has no ear for my threats--it has no substance, that my hands can grasp, or my weapons find invulnerable--it commands and cannot be commanded--it acts and is insusceptible of my reaction--the more I strive to subdue it, the more I am compelled to think of it--and the more I think of it, the more do I find it to possess a reality out of myself, and not to be a phantom of my own imagination; that all, but the most abandoned men, acknowledge its authority, and that the whole strength and majesty of my country are pledged to support it; and yet that *for me* its power is the same with that of my own permanent Self, and that all the choice, which is permitted to me, consists in having it as my Guardian Angel or my avenging Fiend! This is the Spirit of LAW! the Lute of

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[129] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Friend*, I, p. 169.
[130] Coleridge, p. 170.
[131] Coleridge, p. 171

> Amphion, the Harp of Orpheus! This is the true necessity, which compels man into the social state, now and always, by a still-beginning, never-ceasing force of moral cohesion.'[132]

And it is the captain, Ball, with "heroism," aided by his characteristic "calmness and foresight," who plays on this harp.

This connection between the suasive power of the law and the harp of Orpheus helps us to answer Christopher Sten, who, although he is aware of the Orpheus of the humanist tradition, claims that it has little connection with Vere, for, as he says, "unlike Vere, Orpheus achieved control over the ship's company by the eloquence of his poetry."[133] But we know now that this statement is not exactly true, for, as we have seen, there *is* an Orphic eloquence--without stretching the sense of eloquence too far-to Vere's actions insofar as they are brought to life and given a body by Melville's eloquence as a story teller. We have, that is, an immediate and almost synergistic sense of Vere's action as "measured form" in Melville's enactment of it in the texture of his style. If we recall Melville's defense of Nelson's supposed "vainglory" against the "martial utilitarians," we can see how this conforms with his conception of the proper role of the poet. His eloquence, in fact, serves as a register and decorous equivalent of, in these circumstances, the actions of a great man. If Nelson's "ornate publication" of himself is vainglory, "then," as Melville puts it, "affectation and fustian is each more heroic line in the great epics and dramas, since in such lines the poet but embodies in verse those exhalations of sentiment that a nature like Nelson, the opportunity being given, vitalizes into acts."(58) So, in a sense, Melville is Vere's Tennyson--that is, Melville is to Vere as Tennyson is to Wellington, although it should be clear that Tennyson is no Melville.

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[132] Coleridge, p. 171.

[133] Christopher Sten, "Vere's Use of the 'Forms': Means and Ends in *Billy Budd*, *American Literature*, 47 (1975), 48.

From this basis, then, we can now move on to see how "measured form" is defined on a larger scale and sustained through the crisis on board ship. The sense of measured division and pattern is established with the announcement of Claggart's death and Budd's sentence, a scene which, as we have noted, is very deliberately structured. Again, all hands are called in the second dogwatch. Then, we have Vere "standing in his place surrounded by all his wardroom officers," with the marine guard on either side of the quarter-deck. The announcement is made. The crew gives out a confused murmur which is quickly met with the shrill whistles of the boatswain and his mates. The command is given to about ship.

The same order and structure of procedure is then brought forward and laid down during the execution scene. All hands are summoned again, at eight bells--again the time is specified--by the call of the boatswain's pipes. Vere, "as before, the central figure among the assembled

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commissioned officers" stands in his place, that is, "nigh the break of the poop deck facing forward," with the marines "in full equipment" below on the quarter-deck "drawn up much as at the scene of the promulgated sentence."(123) The sentence is executed, just as it was promulgated, according to form, including, of course, Budd's extraordinary but nonetheless conventional benediction of the captain the moment before he is hanged. And, as before, the crew, after a stunned silence, gives out a murmur, which, as it begins to "wax into a clamor," is "met by a strategic command," this time coming with "abrupt unexpectedness," to the boatswain to pipe down the starboard watch. The men who remain on deck are kept busy, as in the aftermath of the announcement, with the routine business of running the ship, "temporary employments connected with trimming the yards and so forth, business readily to be got up to serve occasion by any officer of the deck."(126)

Just as with the announcement and execution, so too with Budd's burial--the final public and official moment of the sequence. First, there is "a second call to all hands, made necessary by the strategic movement before mentioned, was sounded, now to witness burial." This time there is no mention of the configuration of Vere, the officers and the marines. Melville simply observes that "the details of this closing it needs not give," so that we may assume that Vere conducts this public ceremony in much the same way as before--just as we may also conclude that Melville is deliberately resisting a developing and simplifying symmetry in his presentation of this tableau. Again, the crew reacts--this time in response to the portentous circling of the seafowl over the spot where Budd's body has entered the water: "An uncertain movement began among them, in which some encroachment was made." This is met with, instead of the shrill whistles of the boatswain and his men, the drum beating to quarters which, as a means equivalent to the whistles has the equivalent effect of, again, dispersing the men. Melville points out that there is a "signal peremptoriness" to this gesture and that it takes place "an hour prior to the customary one." Nevertheless, it succeeds in redirecting the men back to their business as sailors once again, although, significantly, not merely as sailors, for the drum beating to quarters is also an ultimate reminder that they are men-of-war's men and that their business is war, just as they are at war. Appropriately, the crisis passes on this note as Melville minutely rehearses and asserts, with the same studied and intense concentration and in a way in which commentary merges with action, the formal gestures appropriate to the occasion:

> The drumbeat dissolved the multitude, distributing most of them along the batteries of the two covered gun decks. There, *as wonted*, the guns' crews stood by their respective cannon erect and silent. *In due course*, the first officer, sword under arm and *standing in his place* on the quarter-deck, *formally received* the successive reports of the sworded lieutenants commanding the sections of batteries below; the last of which reports being made, the summed report he delivered with the *customary* salute to the commander. All this

> occupied time, which in the present case was the object of beating to quarters at an hour prior to the *customary* one. That such a *variance from usage* was authorized by an officer like Captain Vere, a martinet as some deemed him, was evidence of the necessity for *unusual* action implied in what he deemed to be the temporary mood of the men.

And, again, with the same rhythmic consciousness of customary procedure set off against the carefully calculated variations of it:

> At this *unwonted* muster at quarters, all proceeded at the *regular hour*. The band on the quarter-deck played a sacred air, after which the captain went through the *customary* morning service. That done, the drum beat the retreat; and toned by music and religious rites subserving the discipline and purpose of war, the men in their *wonted orderly manner* dispersed to *places allotted* to them when not at the guns.(128)

This movement, as I have attempted to describe it, recalls the order-inducing movement which emerges in the concluding chapters of *The Scarlet Letter* which I have discussed in an earlier chapter. However, in *The Scarlet Letter*, the sources of disorder seem more tractable in a way that suggests Hawthorne's inability to realize them in his style. At least, it would seem so on comparison with Melville, for the measured form he creates carries with it, or rather, enfolds within it and absorbs a thoroughly realized presence of anarchic feeling. Indeed, if we sense that this feeling is there and gathering strength throughout the sequence of events which begins with Claggart's approach to Vere on the quarter-deck, it fully comes to life during the execution scene. Here, for perhaps the first time in the tale, we get a direct sense of the massive and entirely destructive power of the mob:

> Suddenly *eight bells* was struck aft, responded to by one louder metallic stroke from forward. It was four o'clock in the morning. Instantly the silver whistles were heard summoning all hands to witness punishment. Up through the great hatchways rimmed with racks of heavy shot the watch below came pouring, overspreading with the watch already on deck the space between the mainmast and the foremast including that occupied by the capacious launch and the black booms tiered on either side of it, boat and booms making a summit of observation for the powder-boys and the younger tars.(122)

It should not be surprising that the author of *Moby-Dick* would conceive this potency in terms of the commingling power (to borrow a phrase from Yvor Winters) and of the moral lawlessness of "the immense Remote, the Wild, the Watery, the Unshored."[134] Moreover, if this power is destructive, it--and *Moby-Dick* is relevant here too--is also alluring, plausibly as alluring to Vere when he stands "unconsciously. . . apparently in one of his absent fits --gazing out from a sashed porthole to windward upon the monotonous blank of the twilight sea" as it is for Ishmael atop the masthead, who feels drawn into "the blending cadence of waves and thoughts."[135]

But, more tellingly, we also feel this alluring power enacted in the style as the crew, in the immediate aftermath of the execution, works its way out of a shocked silence:

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[134] Melville, *Moby-Dick*, p. 402.
[135] Melville, p. 140.

> The silence at the moment of execution and for a moment or two continuing thereafter, a silence but emphasized by the regular wash of the sea against the hull or the flutter of the sail caused by the helmsman's eyes being tempted astray, this emphasized silence was gradually disturbed by a sound not easily to be verbally rendered. (125)

The repetitive structure here suggests an expectant listening and hovering over the moment, just as it suggests an accumulating pressure of feeling working its way to the surface, fraught with explosive possibility. Then, as Melville does indeed attempt to render verbally the quality of this sound:

> Whoever has heard the freshet-wave of a torrent suddenly swelled by pouring showers in tropical mountains, showers not shared by the plain; whoever has heard the first muffled murmur of its sloping advance through precipitous woods may form some conception of the sound now heard. The seeming remoteness of its source was because of its murmurous indistinctness, since it came from close by, even from the men massed on the ship's open deck. Being inarticulate, it was dubious in significance further than it seemed to indicate some capricious revulsion of thought or feeling such as mobs ashore are liable to, in the present instance possibly implying a sullen revocation on the men's part of their involuntarily echoing of Billy's benediction. (126)

The seductive cadence of this passage, along with the light touches of sibilance scattered throughout it, register the fact that the crew's response, however ominous, has an unmistakable and even inseparable quality of loveliness. Indeed, our perception of its beauty precedes our apprehension of its terrible potency. The syntax and the overall structure of the passage ensures this, for the effect is to suspend the details before our attention which, if they together represent the very real difficulty in isolating and identifying the source of this sound, they also represent a due sympathetic submission to the attractive pull of natural feeling.

Melville's style acknowledges the presence of this feeling in other ways as well. This leads us back to the more studied asymmetry discussed in the previous chapter and which is alluded to in Warner Berthoff's observation that Melville "will not force his tales out of their advancing line of truth--not for the sake of a moral argument, nor a dramatic sensation, nor any preconceived formality of design." A significant instance of this compositional tact--which, unfortunately, Berthoff does not mention, appears within this sequence in chapter 25 at the precise moment of Budd's execution:

> The hull, deliberately recovering from the periodic roll to leeward, was just regaining an even keel when the last signal, a preconcerted dumb one, was given. At the same moment it chanced that a vapory fleece hanging low in the East was shot through with a soft glory as of the Fleece of the Lamb of God seen in the mystical vision, and simultaneously therewith, watched by the mass of upturned faces, Billy ascended; and, ascending, took the full rose of the dawn.

The inversion here slows the action down, prolonging the execution scene, as Melville pauses to relate the moment of execution--a precisely timed moment--to first a point of equilibrium and then of apotheosis. Then, in what is in fact the immediate aftermath of the execution, Melville observes:

> In the pinioned figure arrived at the yard-end, to the wonder of all no motion was apparent, none save that created by the ship's motion, in moderate weather so majestic in a great ship so ponderously cannoned.

But rather than going on to give the details of the effect this has on the crew (this, in fact, is not taken up until chapter 27) Melville rather abruptly interrupts the forward movement of his narrative--his studied asymmetry asserting itself again--to give an account in the intermediary chapter 26 of the discussion between the purser and the ship's surgeon concerning the extraordinary absence of the usual "spasmodic movement:"

> When, some days afterward, in a reference to the singularity just mentioned, the purser, a rather ruddy rotund person more accurate as an accountant than profound as a philosopher, said at mess to the surgeon, 'What testimony to the force lodged in will power,... (124)

And so on. The upshot of this conversation is the consideration of the question of whether or not, as the purser asks the surgeon, Budd's death was caused "by the halter" or by "a species of Euthanasia." The question is not decided. But the effect of this intrusion is to lift us out of the critical moment and to emphasize the wonderfulness of the event itself. And, having removed us to the relative safety and security of "some days afterward," Melville forces the reader to shift his attention from the more suspenseful question of "will the ship survive?" to the more exploratory one of "how does it survive?" That is, the reader is rather abruptly and preemptively pulled out of an anticipated crisis to contemplate the broader implications of the event. But it would be misleading, I think, to characterize this intrusion as merely the didactic imposition of a ready-made perspective; it also reflects an abrupt, impromptu and almost muscular effort (because it is so abrupt) on Melville's part to hold to that perspective. If this is the same quality of abruptness which characterizes the preemptive intrusion of the shrill whistles of the boatswain's men or the drums of beating to quarters, it is also with a certain abruptness that Vere pulls himself away from the sashed porthole and the siren's call back to the judicious and critical discipline of "a mind resolute to surmount difficulties even if against primitive instincts as strong as the wind and the sea."(109)

This, then, is the pressure that Vere's measured forms must organize and control--the transitory but potent force which threatens to collapse the human world of the *Bellipotent* into the Moment, detached from past, present, and future. To the extent that we can, along with Vere, feel any sympathy for Billy and for the crew's response, we feel this pressure too just as we try to govern it. It is also true that the order on board ship could not be maintained if Vere himself were not sympathetically open to (because tempted by) this massive force of natural feeling and that we understand and value this order because the contrary pressure of the anarchic is so firmly realized. Can we imagine--and I think Melville invites this--what would happen if the situation were handled by the other captains who figure in the tale? Captain Graveling? Alexander Slidell Mackenzie? Even Nelson, for all his efficacious charisma, is merely the instrument of order in the incident on board the *Theseus*. That he transfer his pennant is the initiative of, significantly, "the admiral in command" who can be plausibly credited with the same kind, if not degree, of wisdom and tact shown by Vere. That is, he shows the wisdom and tact of the reverent gentleman.

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